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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

**THE ART OF LIFE
IN THE
BHAGAVAD - GITA
H. V. Divatia**

GENERAL EDITORS

**K. M. MUNSHI
N. CHANDRASEKHARA AIYER**



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY

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2. Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

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7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

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- (b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—
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 - (ii) a spirit of inquiry,
 - (iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharata and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha, and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world.



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आ तो भद्राः कृतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

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Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I-89-i

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2

THE ART OF LIFE IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

BY H. V. DIVATIA

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THE ART OF LIFE IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

BY
H. V. DIVATIA

With a foreword by
B. G. KHER
Chief Minister, Bombay State



1951

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IN March 1951, I organised the Book University of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Its object is to produce books in a uniform get-up and at cheap price covering the best literature in the world and in particular the literature which stands for India and the fundamentals for which Indian culture stands.

As a first step, it has been decided to publish in English 100 books selected by the General Editors, out of which 50 will be taken on hand immediately. The books will be approximately of 200 to 250 pages, priced at Rs. 1-12-0 per copy.

It is also the intention to publish these and other books also in eight other Indian languages, viz. (1) Hindi, (2) Bengali, (3) Gujarati, (4) Marathi, (5) Tamil, (6) Telugu, (7) Kannada and (8) Malayalam. This common pool of literature will enable the readers to appreciate world currents as also currents in our own Indian literature which, though differing in languages, have a common technique and urge.

This Scheme involving the publication of 900 volumes requires an all-India organisation as also ample resources. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to plan and organise it.

The Bhavan by its objective stands for the re-integration of Indian culture in the light of modern needs and a resuscitation of its fundamental values, viz. :

- (a) the dignity of Man implying the imperative-ness of social conditions conducive to his

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 freedom so that he may evolve on the lines
 of his own temperament and capabilities;

- (b) harmony of individual efforts and social relations within the framework of the Moral Order;
- (c) urge for the creative art of life, by which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of the Divine, and see Him in all and all in Him.

Fittingly, the Book University's first book is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by no less a person than C. Rajagopalachari, one of the greatest of living Indians; the second is on the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed that "What is not in it is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries we can say the same thing. Who knows it not, knows not life, its beauty, its trials, its tragedy and its grandeur.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic. It is also a romance, a tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine, a whole literature, a whole code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations and of speculative thought, with its core of the *Gita*, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest saga working up to the Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

The literature of India, ancient and modern, through all its languages, will also be brought into a common pool easily accessible to all. Books in other languages which may illustrate these principles

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

vii

Vinay Avasthi Sahib Bhuvan Vani Trust Donations will also be included. The world, in all its sordidity, was, I felt, too much around us. Nothing will lift, inspire and uplift as beauty and aspiration learnt through books.

I thank all who have helped and worked to make this branch of Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,

NEW DELHI:

3rd October 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

FOREWORD

THOSE who wish to understand the true significance of the message of the Bhagavad-Gita and cannot study big volumes in order to do so will find this small book by Mr. H. V. Divatia of invaluable assistance. He has attempted to look at the Gita as a treatise on the art of life and to discuss its teachings from that standpoint. He has been pre-eminently successful in his attempt. In ten small chapters he has described the psychology, epistemology, cosmology, metaphysics, and ethics of the Gita and in the concluding chapter discussed how far modern science confirms the teachings of the philosophy of life behind the Gita. Mr. Divatia was a student and teacher of philosophy before he became a lawyer and his training as a lawyer and experience as a Judge have given him a clear and balanced outlook, a capacity to weigh and judge things impartially as his book amply testifies.

In a short foreword it is not possible to discuss the book fully. But the following few lines may give the casual reader some idea of the book and its contents. As he says in his introduction, the Bhagavad-Gita is not "a logical or didactic treatise" * * * "It is a song, an imaginary narrative of questions and answers in which discussion proceeds from topic to topic till it reaches its culmination when Arjuna is convinced that his salvation lay in doing his duties unattachedly and disinterestedly without caring for their outward results."

In Chapter III we get this: "Our lower self is to be lifted up by the higher self and not annihilated. How this is to be achieved is the main theme of the Bhagavad-Gita. The Gita recommends three sovereign remedies for it. What keeps us low down in the scale of life is excessive attachment to sensuous objects and frustration in not obtaining the fruits of action and the fulfilment of our desires. For that purpose it is absolutely necessary to acquire *firstly*, a sense of non-attachment to sensuous objects even while experiencing them (*Anasakti*), *secondly*, renunciation of desires to enjoy the fruits of actions while doing them (*Karma-Phala-Tyaga*), and *thirdly*, an equilibrium of all our mental faculties (*Yoga*). How to acquire these is the great art which the Gita teaches us. The senses, the mind and *Buddhi* or reason are the three ingredients of our lower human nature. *Buddhi* is used in the general sense of self-conscious intellect which has a three-fold function, viz. (1) discrimination, (2) concentration or devotion, and (3) determination."

As regards the great controversy as to whether the Gita enjoins the *Bhakti Marga*, *Karma Marga* or *Jnana Marga*, Mr. Divatia says: "Neither without true devotion, i.e. single-mindedness for the ideal to be achieved nor without action, i.e. discharge of one's duties, can a man be truly called a man of knowledge. According to the Gita the essence of *Bhakti* lies in devotion to the ideal of self-realization or self-sur-render by which the self is purged of its lower and animal qualities and its innate higher nature becomes

strong enough to direct our mental faculties.”

The author has discussed the old controversy of determinism versus free will. According to the Gita, man has freedom of will to do as he wishes but the will is under the sway of natural forces which he has got to obey and thus become an instrument of God by surrendering his will to Him. He has also dealt fully with the charges against the Vedanta that its doctrine of *Maya* leaves no room for moral responsibility of the individual, that it is a religion of pessimism and also with the argument that the doctrine of *Karma* is fatalism. The conduct of a man is judged as good or bad not on the material benefits it may produce, but on whether it purifies or degrades the soul.

Mr. Divatia's knowledge of the theories of western philosophy enables him to compare the teachings of the Gita with the conclusions arrived at by modern western thinkers. Thus, e.g. about the doctrine of *Karma* he quotes a passage from Shaw Desmond in his "Re-incarnation for Every Man": "*Karmic Law* has wide implications than the purely individual, but these need not here concern us. For we not only build up our own *Karma*, but in doing so, we are building up the *Karma* of our family, our friends and our nation which in turn reacts upon us. As in the law of Return or re-incarnation, the law of *Karma* is all part of a greater Plan which is working out behind life, not only on this planet but elsewhere. There are 'race' and 'group' *Karmas*, even the *Karma* of our Universe, and we can at will take some of these

greater *Karmas* upon us as individuals."

The philosophy of history leads us to the conclusion that "there is God in the history of men as well as in the rest of the world." The discussion of the theory of *Karma* is particularly illuminating; according to this theory *Karmavada*, as rightly understood, is based on freedom of will and responsibility for our actions within the domain of the laws of nature by which we are bound. We are bound by our past accumulated *Karma* but we can free ourselves from this bondage by knowledge, devotion or disinterested work.

The religion of the Gita is dealt with in Chapter VIII. It begins by saying that "if humanity is to be treated as one and indivisible and if there is one God in the universe, it follows as a necessary corollary that there can be only one religion for all—the religion of humanism." The author thinks that there is no conflict between "faith and reason." "Whenever our knowledge is imperfect but our inner experience transcends it, we support it by faith. Reason guided by knowledge, devotion and faith should always go together. The one without the other does not attain fulfilment."

Mr. Divatia holds the view that the discoveries of modern science only demonstrate the truth intuitively arrived at by the ancient seers of India and confirm their doctrines. He refers to the modern trend in science which has completely given up materialism and quotes Sir Richard Gregory and other modern scientists in support of his views. Hinduism, ac-

According to him, is not merely a religious creed, but a moral and social code of life, consisting of numerous and conflicting dogmas giving rise to rival sects and schools of thought. The solutions which it has offered for the deeper problems of life on its spiritual side have been misunderstood and misinterpreted. The main aspects of the Gita which the author has discussed are his emphasis on inner religion, importance of work and duty, a sense of non-attachment towards the material side of life, need for disinterested service and social sense and the development of humanitarian ideals and he has discussed all these in great detail in the concluding chapter.

This book is a very useful addition to the vast literature on the Bhagavad-Gita and young students, and others who have no access to the original, due to ignorance of Sanskrit or by reason of having no time to devote to a close study of the subject, will find this book of very great help.

BOMBAY:

14th August 1951.

B. G. KHER

PREFACE

THIS small book does not claim to deal exhaustively with the most profound topic which it discusses. The scholar will not find anything new in it which he does not know. It is primarily meant for persons who have not made a close study of the Gita but who wish to make a general acquaintance with the problems which it propounds and the solutions which it offers.

There was a belief that the Gita is a sacred book, the verses of which were to be recited to gain religious merit, whether one understood their meaning or not. Orthodox people devoutly read the Gita and consoled themselves with the belief that they had merely to read it, leaving its lessons to be learnt by learned people knowing the Sanskrit language. However, with the increase in the number of persons studying Sanskrit as well as with the translations of the Gita not merely in Indian but in world languages, its supreme merit as a treatise inculcating the eternal truths of human life is being recognised in the East as well as in the West. There is a growing number of persons who wish to know something about the Gita without having the inclination or the time to study it in the original. Our youths studying in colleges have no opportunity of being acquainted with it in the course of their studies except when they are learning Indian Philosophy as their special subject. The very large number of students who are concerned with the study of professional or scientific subjects are

inclined to regard it as a mystical and abstruse work containing obsolete ideas which are superseded by modern scientific notions. They are so much engrossed and enamoured with the properties of material objects and bodies that they are afraid of being 'unscientific' if they read books about the human mind and soul. Many of them do not know that the discoveries of modern science, even though they touch only a fragment of the mysteries of nature, have already turned several eminent scientists into idealists and spiritualists. In such a profound subject as Universal Nature, half-baked knowledge is sometimes worse than no knowledge. It results in making men struggle into the sea of life without chart or compass. It is not possible for all men to know everything that is worth knowing about the laws prevailing in nature but it is the duty of every man who calls himself educated and cultured to acquire a sense of values about the things of life and to regulate his own life in the light of that knowledge. Each man has to make his own approach to the problems which face him for their solution, according to his mental capacity. He cannot therefore avoid developing his own philosophy of life, however imperfect it may be. He must acquire a standard for assessing the comparative values of his mental and material possessions. That is why books like the Bhagavad-Gita, which teach us the art of fixing such values, should be not only read but understood and digested. If its teachings appeal to the heart of the reader, they should be followed and not merely appreciated.

Students should not start with a prejudice against the supposed mysticism of the Gita. In this age of relativity, even mysticism has become a relative expression and fifty more years of further researches into the mysteries of physical nature will wipe off the alleged antagonism between scientific facts and the ultimate truths of perennial philosophy which are regarded as mystical to-day. In the meanwhile, the spiritual hunger of the modern world is being stimulated after the long starvation of the mind which has been deprived of the nourishing food of higher thought. This book is an humble attempt to supply a morsel of such food to persons who are feeling the pangs of spiritual hunger and it will have fulfilled its purpose if it succeeds in producing a feeling of solace and satisfaction, however small, in the minds of even a few persons. If it stimulates their appetite still more, they can make a closer study of the Gita and the philosophy which forms its background.

The English translation of the verses of the Gita is mainly taken from 'Shrimad Bhagavad-Gita' published by the Advaita Ashram, Mayavati, Almora.

I must express my sincere thanks to the Honourable Shri B. G. Kher, Chief Minister of the State of Bombay, for kindly writing a foreword for this book.

26A, RIDGE ROAD,
BOMBAY-6:
5th September 1951.

H. V. DIVATIA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	INTRODUCTORY	1
II	APPROACH OF THE GITA	10
III	PSYCHOLOGY OF THE GITA	18
IV	EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE GITA	32
V	COSMOLOGY OF THE GITA	45
VI	METAPHYSICS OF THE GITA	59
VII	ETHICS OF THE GITA	86
VIII	RELIGION OF THE GITA	125
IX	THE GITA AND MODERN SCIENCE ..	138
X	THE GITA AND THE MODERN AGE ..	153

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

So much has been said and written about the Bhagavad-Gita in recent years that a new treatise about it, especially by one who does not claim to be an expert on the subject, may be considered superfluous, if not presumptuous. And yet the subject is so fascinating as well as elevating, that one may be pardoned if he is tempted to lay his thoughts before the public to be considered for what they are worth. The eternal truths and laws of physical and human nature which are embodied and intertwined in the Gita will ever remain the subject of study so long as humanity lasts on this globe and struggles to reach perfection. It is, indeed, true that the views on which its philosophic treatment is based have remained controversial but it is bound to remain so, so long as our human faculties are imperfect and unable to comprehend the absolute nature of Ultimate Reality. That, however, is no reason for ignoring these views and opinions if they have stood the test of time. If the teachings of the Gita give solace to human mind, amidst the troubles and turmoils of everyday life, enabling a person to lead a better, fuller and purer life, the fact that different views may be held on the ultimate metaphysical principles on which they are based, need not deter us from putting those teachings in practice. After all, it is the practical life of a man that determines his goodness and not his knowledge of the philosophical subtleties which justify

his conduct. Knowledge about the ultimate Reality no doubt illuminates the mind which pulls the reins of action and determines the course of conduct but if one is aware of his duties and does them disinterestedly, he earns as much merit as a person who does the same thing with the full consciousness of the reasons why it is a duty. That is the great lesson which the Bhagavad-Gita teaches to every man, whether he is a genius or a common man.

The Gita contains such a multitude of aspects that it can be looked at from various standpoints of human psychology, cosmology, ethics, metaphysics or religion. In the following pages I have attempted to look at the Gita as a treatise on the art of life and to discuss its teachings from that standpoint. In doing so, it would be necessary to cover all its important aspects but only so far as to show how the Gita considers life as an art. At the same time, just as a real artist must be conscious of why and how he is creating his artistic work, a person, in order to be a good man of action, must be conscious of the purpose of life with a background of the knowledge of the relation of human life to the ultimate reality of which it is a manifestation.

We will first begin by ascertaining the nature of Art. The term 'Art' is used in two senses. It means a device to achieve an object by using appropriate means. It also means, in its technical sense, the production of an object, in which all its variegated and even conflicting elements are so proportionately arranged and synthesised that it produces in our

mind a sense of harmony and beauty. Nature, whether physieal or mental, contains a mass of variegated and heterogeneous forces which produce a constant conflict resulting in the suppression and even destruction of the one by the other, if they are left to activate themselves. If, however, they are controlled and subdued by using each in its proper proportion, the conflict is not only lessened in its intensity but gives place to an organic whole in which each force plays its proper part by supporting the whole and enabling it to carry out the object or the function for which it is created. This is the essence of what is known as creative art. But the term 'Art' is also applied to a faithful imitation or representation of what really exists in nature, whether it is good or bad, beautiful or ugly. Some persons regard the essence of art as consisting in 'art for its own sake' and not for teaching a moral lesson to the people. The mission of art is said to be to portray life as it is and to impress others by the vividness of reality and it is left to them to draw any lesson they like from it. It does sometimes happen that if an artist, whether a poet or a novelist or a sculptor, consciously wants to teach a moral, he does so at the expense of either ignoring or overstressing actuality and to that extent it is at the sacrifice of artistic merit. Real art consists in producing an object, which, without being felt as a forced moral lesson, yet provokes imagination as well as thought and unconsciously leads a person to a higher plane. The art with which we are concerned is not merely imitative but essentially

selective and as such creative.

Take for example the art of painting, music, dancing, sculpture, and architecture. In all of them, the artist deals with physical materials, forms a mental picture of what he wishes to create out of them and for that purpose selects some, ignores others, and fixes the proportion of the quality and quantity of various materials to be used for producing the desired piece of art. The painter selects the canvas, colour and their shapes, the architect selects either marble, stone or brick and the size, shape and colour in which to arrange them. The musician selects the notes and tone and volume of the sounds so as to produce a harmonious whole in which each part tends to enhance the beauty of the whole piece of art which he projects in his mind. The merit of his art depends on his sense of proportion and harmony. The poet or the novelist works upon ideas, real as well as imaginary, blends them in an aesthetic manner and garbs them in an attractive form of expression so as to penetrate into the minds of his readers and create a lasting impression on the mental screen. But there is a higher art in which the artist has to work on materials which are not physical objects or imaginary ideas but the subtle forces of body and mind opposing each other, consisting of instinctive impulses, desires and attachments on the one hand and ideas, sacrifices, renunciation, detachment, and faculties of discrimination, devotion and determination on the other. He has to work amidst the constant conflict between the lower and the higher nature of man and out of all

these divergent elements to produce a well-ordered, balanced and beautiful life to reach the steep upward summit of human progress.

What are known as fine arts are no doubt so, as they make their appeal to human senses as opposed to mechanical arts, which are concerned with inanimate objects but the art of life is the finest art as the elements of that art are themselves sensuous and mental processes of human organism. Man is thus the supreme artist among all and is to be judged as such by the way in which he shapes his life. He can make it beautiful or ugly as he likes, according to the manner in which he creates the mosaic of his mind.

What, then, has the Bhagavad-Gita to teach us in the art of life? If we digest its teachings and understand the scheme in which they are elucidated, there can, I think, be no other answer than that, it is, par excellence, a treatise on the art of life. The keynote of the whole 'Song Celestial' is *Yoga*. It is on this central theme that the whole of its treatment of various topics revolves. It is called *Yogashastra*. Every chapter is described at its end as containing a dissertation of a particular kind of *Yoga*. The etymological meaning of *Yoga* is that which joins or unites and is akin to the English word 'yoke'. As we have seen above, union or synthesis of divergent elements is of the essence of art. The secondary meaning of *Yoga* is control, equability of reason and contemplation, because mental control and poise cannot be achieved without mental equilibrium. *Yoga* is thus the supreme art of creating synthesis, inte-

gration, or harmonious adjustment between the various springs of action. The whole superstructure of the Gita is raised on the foundation of the art of producing peace and tranquillity of mind amidst the surging waves of mental states and creating unity out of variety in the inner life of man. It is for achieving this result that the Bhagavad-Gita leads us into the psychological, physical and metaphysical principles of life, its knowledge being very useful for a successful application of this art. The performance of actions without desire for their fruits, and acquiring a sense of detachment of mind in worldly life are the two great lessons which the Gita teaches us and it lays constant stress on the fact that we cannot succeed in imbibing these difficult lessons unless we practise the unique art of *Yoga* in living our daily lives.

What then is the technique of *Yoga*? Is the art of *Yoga* based on scientific and logical treatment or is it partly mystical and dogmatic dissertation? Is it supported by modern scientific principles or have we to accept its reasonings as if it were a gospel truth? These are some of the questions which are bound to arise in the minds of modern educated men who would naturally accept an assertion only if it stands the test of reason. It is mainly for the sake of such persons that I have been prompted to lift my pen and record my ideas and impressions on these points. If it is claimed that the Gita inculcates the eternal truths of life and reveals the recesses of the human mind, they must be examined in the light of the knowledge which we have gained of physical and

human nature. If it survives that test, it becomes our duty not only to study it but to put its teachings into practice especially in the present age when men's minds have been unhinged after the two world wars and a false sense of values in life has inverted the progress of mankind. It is indeed true that the Gita contains several ideas and beliefs which were prevalent in the age when it was written but have become obsolete now. But the Gita also contains a number of truths about the human mind and its working as well as the nature of the ultimate reality, which have stood the test of time.

It is not my purpose to discuss the time when the Gita was originally composed. Eminent scholars have offered their views on this point. The latest period which we can put down for its composition is about 600 B.C. But it is certain from its internal evidence that the author of the Gita has constructed his thesis by adopting some of the philosophical as well as social opinions of the day and rejecting several others. His principal aim was to base the doctrine of *Yoga* partly on the original Vedas but mostly on the Upanishads and to readjust the current philosophical and social beliefs of the day. The object of the Gita was not to revolutionise and destroy the beliefs and institutions then prevailing as Buddhism and Jainism did. At first sight it would appear that there are contradictory passages in the Gita which cannot both be true as we shall see later on. There is also a tendency to justify the current social structure and other notions which cannot be

true for all times. How much then are we to accept and how much to reject from its teachings? It would also appear to a casual reader of the Gita that several aspects of a problem have been discussed without definitely stating which of them it supports. For example, whether the way of knowledge or devotion or action is the best. Similar questions may arise as to whether the Gita supports the worship of the manifested God or unmanifested Absolute, the nature of both of which it discusses. All these questions are indeed legitimate in the manner in which the subject has been treated in different portions of the Gita and an answer to these questions cannot be given unless we appreciate the line of approach taken by the Gita in tackling the most complex and abstruse problems of human nature. This line of approach itself cannot be understood unless we appreciate what were the prevalent opinions of the day which the Gita either attempted to justify or to modify. It is impossible to grasp the trend of discussion of these problems in the Gita without a knowledge of this background. The Gita has, indeed, struck a new path of solving the intricate problems of human conduct but that path being one of adjustment of the decaying and unsuitable old with the growing feeling of a new way of life, it cannot be fully understood unless we know what the Gita wanted to reconstruct and how it proceeds to do so.

In the context in which the Gita appears in the Mahabharata, it is in the form of a discourse given by Shri Krishna to Arjuna on the battle-field. That

may or may not have been so. Even assuming that Krishna exhorted Arjuna to fight and explained to him that it was not a sin, the whole discourse as it appears in the present form could not have been given in the chariot while the fighting was going on. Veda Vyasa Muni, the reputed author of the Mahabharata, it appears, utilised this occasion to explain the philosophy of life of the common man whose mind was torn between the conflicting dogmas then prevailing about human conduct and the goal of life. He wanted to give peace and solace to the minds of men who have to pursue their daily avocations of domestic and social life as it existed then and also to seek salvation for their souls. He did not wish to unsettle their minds by asking them to give up all prevalent conceptions of duties and the beliefs on which they were based. His principal aim was to impress on the average man that he can as much obtain the *summum bonum* of life as a man of great knowledge, devotion or meditation will do, if he did his duties disinterestedly and with a sense of detachment. He took his stand on the Vedas but wanted to avoid the excesses and dogmatism of Vedic ritualism as well as the renunciatory mentality of the Upanishads. He saw that Aryan civilization could be saved not by breaking with the past, but by utilising the teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads for founding a new theory of life which would be acceptable to all men of average attainments. We have thus to see how he makes his approach to the task before him.

CHAPTER II

APPROACH OF THE GITA

WE have travelled a very long way from the days when Nature filled the primitive mind of man with fear and terror. We have probed deep into the mysteries of physical nature and harnessed its forces for our material comforts. We feel that we have conquered nature, though now and then we are reminded that we are still far from being its masters. The primitive man had however to woo and even fight the elements of nature in the struggle for existence and bow down to the forces over which he had not learnt to exercise any control. The human mind had not yet turned inwards but had to remain occupied with the appeasement and propitiation of external forces. Such was the state when one branch of the Aryans migrated to India. All ancient peoples had their gods corresponding to the forces of nature but the Aryans in India were inspired more than any other people in compiling an elaborate code for paying their homage to and seek protection from their gods. Their minds were captured by the awful grandeur and sublimity of natural forces which they saw around them in the Himalayas and they imagined the supernatural as they saw it through the natural world. They gave expression to their intuitive thoughts through prose, verse and song in the most outstanding religious compilation of the ancient world, the Vedas, which show the apex of lofty height of thought and imagination to which the human mind had reached.

Each principal force of nature which gave, nourished as well as destroyed life on earth was represented by a God, such as, Sun, Wind, Fire, Water etc. They were to be appeased by performing sacrifices or *yajnas* the rites and ceremonies of which were fixed on a very intricate and elaborate scale. The offerings to God made in the sacrificial fire consisted of animals and material articles like corn, milk and its products etc. accompanied by incantations to the glory of the particular god so that he may shower his blessings on the sacrificer. However, behind the notion of multiple gods, there was a dim realisation of one supreme Spirit as representing the Supreme Force which kept all the forces of nature together. The conception of Aditi as a Goddess representing Infinity as well as the dictum that "There is one Reality. Wise men call it by various names" point to the belief in a unified Godhead. So also in the well-known Purusha-Sukta in Rig Veda, there is the description of the cosmic *Purusha* who not only pervades but transcends the universe. This notion, however, remained in the background of the earlier portions of the Vedas which were specially concerned with the institution of *Yajna*. Rains, prosperity, happiness and heavenly bliss all depended upon the right performance of sacrifices over which the Brahmins officiated as priests.

As happens in all religious systems, the ritualistic practice of religion tends to become mechanical in course of time and in the case of this sacrificial religion, several circumstances combined to strengthen a kind of revolt against its practices. The early

feelings of awe and fear of natural forces which had led to their appeasement by sacrifices became gradually subdued and as the Aryans became more and more at home with their surroundings, and their minds began to turn inwards, they began to look upon all natural phenomena as fleeting manifestations of the supreme Spirit or energy which also lived in human bodies as individual souls. These souls were like sparks from the fire of the one and the only Reality. Man's duty, therefore, was to know all that he can of this Reality and its relation to himself by introspection and contemplation. Happiness consisted not in attaining heavenly bliss but in the realisation of one's own self by renunciation of everything that was liable to change or to debase the mind, and in ultimately obtaining release from successive rebirths by being emerged in the Brahman or cosmic Soul. Thus a different branch of the later Vedas came into existence known as *Jnyana Kanda* or repository of knowledge as opposed to the earlier Vedas which were known as *Karma Kanda* or Catechism of rituals. The latter consists of Samhitas and Brahmanas while the former were called Aranyakas and Upanishads which were compiled by sages who had left the world and retired into forests. Thus rose the dawn of Indian Philosophy and culture which has remained as one of the landmarks in the history of human thought. Although the Upanishads laid more stress on the contemplative and philosophical aspect of religion and made some satirical references to the mere ritualistic practices performed for the sake of worldly happiness,

they accepted the authorities of the earlier Vedas and remained an integral part of the Vedic system.

The more serious opposition to the Vedic injunctions came from another quarter which had far-reaching repercussions in course of time. The Vedic propitiation of Gods was made by sacrifices of articles of daily use to men and such as would please the minds of Gods. They were articles of food, especially animals, as Aryans, like all others then, were a meat-eating race. The growing sentiment that all souls including those of animals were sacred and that it was a sin to kill animals revolted against the slaughter of innocent animals for a supposed accession to heaven. More stress was laid on the necessity of austerities of life and suppression of animal instincts rather than on sacrificial oblations. In point of time this opposition was first led by people who later on consolidated themselves into a new religious sect known to this day as Jainism. They not only forbade animal sacrifice but also the use of animals as human food. The doctrine of *Ahimsa* and *Tapas* became the rallying point of this sect which formed a code of life for itself outside the Vedic fold. This new doctrine considerably influenced the minds of people even inside the Vedic fold throughout the land and was a potent factor in the gradual disappearance of animal sacrifices.

But the more spectacular opposition came from a later school of thought which revolted against the priestcraft of the Vedic Religion and attempted to found religion on an ethical basis to such an extent as to substitute formal religion by a stern ethical code

of life. Although they did not go to the length of prohibiting the use of animal food altogether, they saw no merit in sacrificing animals and practising all the outward forms of Vedic religion which, according to them, had no effect in improving the morals of men. So strong was their opposition to the Vedic theology that had no use of the supreme deity or even of soul as conceived by the Vedas. There was no distinction between man and man as against the Varnashrama doctrine of the Vedas. This was the school which later brought forth one of the greatest religious reformers in the world in the person of Gautama Buddha who founded a system of philosophy which became a great rival to Vedic Religion in India. It is noteworthy that the chief exponents both of Jainism and Buddhism were Kshatriyas and their Vedic opponents consisted mainly of Brahmins who still adhered to all the Vedic rites and practices. In fact Buddhism was a great revolution against the demoralisation of the people that had crept into society. Although Buddhism came on the scene after the principal Upanishads were composed, there were some common points between them with regard to religion being a matter of inner life for the purification of mind and promotion of selfless conduct. Both lay more or less stress on the renunciation of worldly pursuits and a life of austerity. Both regard release as the consummation of life and what is more, both, as also Jainism, believe in the doctrine of *Karma* and its corollary of rebirth. But, while the Upanishadic doctrines were based on the foundation of Vedas, the

other two did not accept their authority and the belief in the existence of God as the all-pervading soul of the Universe.

Such were the prevailing schools of religion when the Gita was composed. On the one hand were the Vedic *karmakadins* who believed in *Yajna* with its intricate and elaborate ceremonials as the principal religious duty of a Hindu. On the other hand, several Upanishads enjoined men to give up worldly pursuits and resort to *Sanyasa*, that is, renunciation of worldly life, for getting salvation. The concept of *Ahimsa*, i.e. non-injury to men or animals, was rapidly coming into favour. The ethical aspect of religion for the common man which had no prominence in the formal religion of the Vedic sacrifice was being stressed by new cults of religious philosophy. The common man was puzzled as to what his duties were and which way lay his emancipation. A new lead had to be given to the people and a fresh orientation had to be made of the doctrines of life which the Aryans had evolved through centuries of thought and meditation. People were becoming either too worldly or were drawn away from the world and to keep them on the middle path, it was being recognised that they needed a philosophy of life in which knowledge, devotion and obligatory duties should have their proper proportion in leading their daily lives. Veda Vyasa Muni, the reputed author of Mahabharata, took the opportunity of evolving such a philosophy which would satisfy the minds of ordinary men without unsettling the basic beliefs of the Vedic religion. The conflict in the mind

of Arjuna the representative of the average man of the world on the battle-field when he had either to fight and kill his relations or run away from the battle-field, was made the occasion for unfolding this unique philosophy in the form of a discourse between Arjuna and Shri Krishna who had become his charioteer.

We need not enter into a discussion whether Shri Krishna was a mythological or a historical figure. We are concerned with the merits of the discourse as if it were a communion between man and his creator. Bhagavad-Gita is not a logical or a didactic treatise in which each proposition logically follows from the other by a chain of reasoning. It is a song, an imaginary narrative of questions and answers in which discussion proceeds from topic to topic till it reaches its culmination when Arjuna is convinced that his salvation lay in doing his duties unattachedly and disinterestedly, without caring for their outward results. Very skilfully, Krishna raises doubts in Arjuna's mind for the purpose of solving them by the discussion of their fundamental basis. When Arjuna begins with his protest against killing and the resulting sin which he would commit, Krishna tells him "Who kills? Not your real self, but your embodied self which has got to kill even your kinsmen for the good of the society in discharging your duties as a Kshatriya". That opens the wider question as to what is the real self and what is the embodied self and what is the relation between the two. The answer to that question cannot satisfy Arjuna's mind unless the true nature of self or soul and its relation to the external

world is described. The whole field of nature including human psychology, cosmology, metaphysics, sociology and ethics had to be surveyed for giving a mental picture of man's position in the scheme of creation.

This description is so skilfully and lucidly given that Arjuna does not feel that a dry and heavy metaphysics is forced on his mind. He is made to enter into the spirit of the problem of life and comes out with a clear notion of its ultimate purpose. He is made to see the various aspects of the question and the different ways in which each man may approach it according to his mental equipment. As men's minds are in different stages of development, each man should make his approach from his own angle of vision and then alone, can he discover the path which leads him to the summit of self-realisation. Just as a mountain appears to be of different sizes, shapes and colours when seen from different angles by different persons, but all persons see the same panorama when they meet on the top, the same problem has got to be approached differently by men of different stages of mind in order to discover its solution and the ultimate truth which is common for all. That is the psychological approach which the Gita makes, based on the fundamental facts of nature, that just as the same light produces different refractions in different sides of a crystal, the same Truth and Reality is differently conceived by different minds. We cannot therefore fully understand the Gita unless we appreciate its psychological basis and its views about the human mind and its working. 20-1-52-

CHAPTER III

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE GITA

It is commonly supposed, and western psychology also proceeds on the basis, that mind is that which is not matter and matter is that which is not mind. But that is not the doctrine of the Gita. Following the Upanishads, it regards mind as belonging to the domain of matter, which is lower *Prakriti*. "Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism—that is how My eightfold *Prakriti* is divided. This is lower *Prakriti*; but different from it is My higher *Prakriti* which is the soul and by which the world is sustained. Know that these are the womb of all beings. I am the origin and dissolution of the whole Universe," says Krishna (VII 4-6). Thus mind, as contrasted with soul, belongs to lower *Prakriti*. It, however, consists of subtle matter as opposed to gross matter forming the body. "The senses are said to be superior (to the body); the mind is superior to the senses; the intellect is superior to the mind; and the soul (or *Atman*) is superior to the intellect" (III 42). The senses and mind are both organs of the body and mind is only a superior sense or organ of the body. "Of the senses, I am the mind" (X 22). "Presiding over the ear, the eye, the touch, the taste and the smell as also the mind, He (self) experiences objects." (XV 9). What then is the exact relation between the senses, mind and intellect, which also form part of the body?

We must first see what is meant by the senses and

reason. Senses are organs of the body through which we make contacts with the outer world. These contacts are twofold—getting impressions from the outside world and transmitting our ideas to the outside world by actions. The five organs through which we get impressions are hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell, known as *Jnyana-Indriyas* or organs of knowledge. The five organs through which we translate our thoughts into actions are speech, hands, feet, generation and secretion. They are known as *Karma-Indriyas*, or organs of action. Each of these ten organs is connected with the brain by means of the nerves. The nerves connecting the organs of knowledge with the brain are known as sensory nerves and those connecting the organs of action with the brain are known as motor nerves in modern physiology. The brain is a switchboard which receives as well as transmits impressions and ideas. There is one difference between modern physiology and the Upanishadic doctrine of senses or mind, that while according to the former, mind resides in the brain, according to the latter, it resides in the heart as all the nerves meet in the heart. But whatever may be the seat of the mind, it is common ground that the mind receives as well as transmits impressions and ideas and makes contacts with the outer world. Each organ of knowledge has its object in the external world and is akin to them. It is the essence of this doctrine that each organ longs to have contact with its objects or rather the mind longs to have such contacts through the organs. This

longing or appetite consists of desires and passions which have a tendency to be more intensive in their activity, the more they are put into action.

These senses belong to the lower nature of man and except the organ of speech, they are commonly shared by human beings with the animal world. Some of the animals possess these senses in a more powerful form than human beings. For example, the eagle has a more powerful eye, the ant has a more powerful sense of smell, the dog has a more powerful sense of hearing as well as smell, etc. In fact the power of our senses is so limited that we cannot cognise through our senses many things which we have reason to believe to be taking place in the outer world. If a noise is too low we cannot hear it, nor can we hear it if it is too loud as modern researches have shown. If the light is too far, as for example that of stars, we cannot see it even with a telescope. A good deal of the outer world is shut out of our knowledge because of our limited senses although we can increase the stock of our knowledge which we have gained through our senses by means of the power of intellect or reason.

That brings us to *Buddhi* or the organ of Reason. This faculty, though higher than mind, is still a subtle organ of the body and stands highest in our lower nature. The mind receives impressions from the outside world through the senses and *Buddhi* is the power by means of which we classify them, put them into ideas and discriminate between them as true or false, right or wrong according to a standard

or ideal which we may fix. But although *Buddhi* is the highest organ, it is still an organ of the body and it is influenced by the mind and the senses. The nature of a man's *Buddhi* depends very much on the quality of his mind and he may lose his power of discrimination, i.e. *Buddhi*, if the mind is too much under the influence of the senses. This relation between the senses and reason is very graphically described in the Gita. "A man thinking (constantly) of objects of senses becomes attached to them; attachment causes longing; from longing grows anger; from anger arises delusion; from delusion arises loss of memory; from loss of memory arises ruin of discrimination and from the loss of discrimination, he ultimately perishes." (II 62, 63). What is meant is that too much thinking of sense objects causes attachment to them which in turn creates a craving for them and as they cannot all be satisfied, there is a sense of frustration which causes anger. Anger clouds the mind causing loss of memory and that results in deterioration of reasoning power or discrimination and a man who loses his reason is as good as dead. Thus *Buddhi* being connected with senses belongs to bodily functions though it is the most subtle organ of the body and if it is to function properly our senses require to be controlled so that it may not lose its sharp edge. Between *Buddhi* and the senses is the mind and therefore mind should control the senses and should, in turn, be controlled by reason. This is very well described by the use of a metaphor in

Kathopanishad: "Know that the soul is the master of the chariot who sits within it and the body is the chariot. Consider the intellect as the charioteer and the mind as the rein. The senses may be said to be the horses and their roads are the sense objects. The wise call Him the enjoyer united with the body, sense and mind." (III 3, 4). To the same effect is the description with some variation in Maitrayani Upanishads (II 6).

In popular parlance the word 'mind' is used in a general sense as covering sense impressions, ideas as well as reason and will. In fact everything that is mental, as opposed to sensuous, is described as belonging to mind. But the mind of a person is the reservoir of all his sense experience impulses, passions, desires and thoughts. Even some animals have minds but not reason and although men have reason which can control the mind, it can itself be affected by the mind and senses. There is thus inter-action between senses, mind and reason which belong to our lower self in the ascending order. We have seen above that beyond the reason is the soul which belongs to our higher nature. As we are considering purely the psychological aspect of the Gita at present, we will take up the discussion about the soul or self after finishing the subject as it is also connected with the cosmology and metaphysics of the Gita. In the meantime, it is necessary to emphasise the point that a proper appreciation of the views of the Gita about the nature of mind and its potentialities for good or evil is absolutely essential

for understanding the true gist of the whole Bhagavad-Gita. "Mind alone is the cause of the freedom or bondage of men."

The human mind has been compared with many things. It is called a reservoir, a deep pit and at one place in the Gita it is compared with wind (VI 34). Although all similes are imperfect and sometimes misleading, the mind can well be compared with a sea of surging waves. Just as the waters of various rivers pour into the sea and are mixed with the waters of its foaming waves, so the impressions and experiences of various senses pour themselves into the vast sea of the mind. Just as the waters of the sea rise or fall by the attraction of the moon, so the desires and passions of mind rise or fall by the action of sense objects and just as sea waters evaporate and after forming themselves into clouds fall on earth as rain and again go to the sea through rivers, our desires and passions leave our minds towards their sense objects, only to return again into the sea of mind with greater force. Just as the sea is very deep and a number of things falling into it are lost into its depths, so a very large amount of our sense experience goes down into the depths of our mind and is forgotten for the time being, although it still remains in the unconscious mind. And just as the surface waters of the sea never remain calm but dash against each other in surging waves running towards land, so also the desires and passions of our conscious mind conflict with one another and set up a stormy agitation in the mind

dragging it towards the shore of the sense world. And just as we require a large and properly propelled boat to travel over the surging sea in a steady manner, we require the strong weight of our reason and will power to sail over the surging desires of the mind.

Arjuna pointedly asks Krishna how to curb and control the mind which is restless, turbulent and as uncontrollable as wind. To this Krishna replies that it is really very difficult, but it can be done gradually by practice and renunciation. (VI 34, 35). At the same time he tells Arjuna that renunciation does not mean annihilation of desires or giving up of all actions. The Upanishadic doctrine which was later partly accepted by the Buddhists was that in order to obtain salvation it was necessary to annihilate desires of the mind and resort to Sanyasa, i.e. renunciation of the world. The Gita regards this not only as an impractical proposition but a psychological impossibility. An attempt to crush all desires like that would only increase the mental conflict. "All beings follow their nature. What is the use of absolute restraint?" (III 33). What is required is not suppression but regulation of the senses. It says "He who, restraining the organs of action, sits revolving in the mind thoughts regarding the object of senses, he, of deluded understanding, is called a hypocrite. But he excels, who controlling the senses of mind, unattached, directs his organs of action to the path of work." (III 6-7). Human nature, being what it is, cannot be wiped out by trying to do the

impossible. Our lower self is to be lifted up by the higher self and not annihilated.

How this is to be achieved is the main theme of the Bhagavad-Gita. To anticipate our future discussion, the Gita recommends three sovereign remedies for it. What keeps us low down in the scale of life is excessive attachment to sensuous objects and frustration in not obtaining the fruits of action and the fulfilment of our desires. For that purpose it is absolutely necessary to acquire, firstly, a sense of non-attachment (*Anasakti*) to sensuous objects even while experiencing them; secondly, renunciation of the desires to enjoy the fruits of actions while doing them (*Karma-Phala-Tyaga*); and thirdly, an equilibrium of all our mental faculties (*Yoga*). How to acquire these qualities is the great art which the Gita teaches us.

But we have still to complete the psychological background of the Gita before we take up that question. We have just seen that *yoga* consists in the equilibrium of our mental faculties. What are those faculties? Here we come to another classification of the ingredients of our mental life. We have seen that the senses, mind and *Buddhi* or reason are the three ingredients of our lower human nature. The word *Buddhi* is used here in the general sense of self-conscious intellect which has a threefold function, viz., discrimination, concentration or devotion and determination. By discriminating between true and false, right and wrong, *Buddhi* is the means of acquiring knowledge. By concentrating or meditat-

ing on an object and excluding all other objects from the mind, *Buddhi* is the means of acquiring devotion. By determining, i.e., willing what is to be done and what is not to be done, *Buddhi* is a means of acquiring the capacity to act and work. The word *Buddhi* in the Gita in the sentence "Place your *Buddhi* in me" in (XII 8) is used in the sense of concentration and the same word in (II 44) is used in the sense of determinative faculty. These three respective acquisitions of the faculties are called by the Gita, *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma*.

Human faculties are not equally developed in all men; they are not separate water-tight compartments of our intellectual set up, but are only three facets of the same thing, acting and reacting on one another. Unequal development of the three destroys the harmonious working of our mind and the central teaching of the Gita is that there must be the Yoga or the union of the working of all the three faculties and the resulting balance of mind if life is to be lived as it should be. Neither non-attachment to sensuous objects nor the firmness to do duty for its own sake, can be rooted in the mind unless it is illuminated by discriminatory knowledge, concentrated on the goal to be reached by devotion and strengthened by the power of determination to carry it out. This is not an easy task which can be achieved in a short time. Man still remains an animal and is prone to degenerate into a brute if his animal nature is not properly controlled even in a so-called civilised age. He need not renounce the world with

a sense of frustration nor should he lead a selfish life and confine his actions to the fulfilment of his bodily needs. He must lead a balanced life with a disciplined mind for the good of the society in which he lives. That is the only way to get happiness which is another name for peace of mind. He should turn inwards and keep his mind pure, steady and firm. Having done that, he must resign himself to be governed by the laws of Nature which is the same thing as Divine Will. This is the psychological background of the Bhagavad-Gita and it must be fully appreciated if its teachings are to be taken to heart.

The modern educated persons will like to know whether the psychology of the Gita is in conformity with the advanced knowledge of mind which we possess in the present age. The fundamental difference between Western and the ancient Indian psychology is that the former divided all phenomenon as belonging to the realm of matter and mind and in the psychological sphere it stopped with mind. The early scientists regarded mind as only a function of the brain and having no existence apart from it. Ancient Indian psychology however regarded mind as belonging to the subtle body of man and the real guiding element in the body is not mind but soul or *Atman*, i.e. Self which is non-material. The Self in its wider sense is twofold, higher and lower. The real Self or the soul is the higher Self and the senses, mind and intellect belong to the embodied self which is the lower self. The reasons underlying

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this view we shall discuss when we go to the metaphysics of the Gita and the theory of *Karma*. It is important to note here that the psychological basis of the Gita cannot be separated from its metaphysical foundation and if this foundation is to be accepted, the psychological basis must also be accepted. In the meanwhile, it is important to note that in recent years several western psychologists have begun to explore the ancient Indian psychology of *Yoga* or control of mind and its underlying metaphysics and several eminent persons out of them have held that the Yogic system answers the fundamental questions about human mind more satisfactorily than western theories.

Freude and his successors Adler and Jung have propounded new theories about human mind, entirely different from the prevailing ones and the last of them comes very near to the Indian theory. In a recently published book "*Yoga and Western Psychology*" its author, Geraldine Coster, has something interesting to say on this subject. She says "The conception of mind as a subtle substance having spatial existence and capable of taking on shape is so basic in Eastern psychology and so foreign to the West that it constitutes a real barrier to mutual understanding On the other hand, the *Yoga* is in complete accord with the modern trend of Western Psychology which recognises most of our thinking as being a defence and flight from reality."¹ "The question of the existence of a Self which is

1. Page 197.

other than the mind is one that has exercised philosophers in the West, and of recent years, experimental psychologists have found good evidence for accepting or at least postulating such a Self as existent.”¹ “In a sense it is true that one fundamental difference between eastern and western psychology is that the former habitually and as a matter of course recognises these layers of consciousness objectively whereas the latter has hardly as yet begun to differentiate them at all.” “*Yoga* as followed in the east is a practical method of mind development quite as practical as analytical therapy and far more practical and closely related to real life than the average university course. Further more, I am convinced that the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali do really contain information that some of the most advanced psychotherapists of the present day are ardently seeking The key to the problem lies in sympathetic appreciation of the eastern approach to the problems of the interior life. As I have said, this approach is neither atheistic nor superstitious; it is scientific and based upon actual experiment.”² The author comes very near the Gita view of mind when he says “The mind reacts both to the seer and the seen” referring to the self on the one hand and sense-experience on the other. As regards psycho-analysis which is being practised more and more in the west, the author says “Analytical therapy is a scientific method of attaining internal equilibrium, and as such approximates

1. Page 222. 2. Page 223.

to the contemplative rather than to the active tradition. In this respect it resembles *Yoga* and the attitude of the two methods to the question of the existence of God, although by no means identical, have points of resemblance.”¹

Prof. N. P. Servadio who lived in India for some years gives his opinion as follows: “Psycho-analysis, further more, has given its own powerful support to Yogic theories from a true psychological standpoint, having approached the subject from a totally new and independent side.” He tells further “we cannot refrain from admiration if we admit that *Yoga* since more than twenty centuries, considers the unconscious psychic life just as psycho-analysis does and almost in the same terms. *Chitta*, the mind stuff according to the *Yoga Sutram* which cannot be identified in any way with the Spirit of *Purusha* is considered by Patanjali as totally unconscious, whereas consciousness is said to be possible only when *Chitta* is illuminated by *Purusha*. Further, we find affirmed that unconscious ideas exist in the *Chitta* as traces, potencies or impressions (*Vasanas*) that ‘they are active and even able to influence the conscious’ (*Behanan*). According to *Yoga*, all the zones of the unconscious, even the deepest ones, can be brought under the light of consciousness and as *Yoga* admits metempsychosis, it also admits a *Super-Individual* unconscious—the archaic unconscious of psycho-analysis, the collective unconscious of Jung—whose domination is its task and final aim”.

1. Page 48.

Several other authors like Aldous Huxley, Paul Brunton and Shaw Desmond may be cited to support the theory of the mind and soul adopted by the Gita and Upanishads and which has been systematised by Panini in his Yoga Sutras. The proceedings of the Society for psychical research also throw light on the astral or subtle body which can exist even apart from its gross covering. We shall have to deal with this point further when we come to the theories of *Karma* and the Universal Soul. It is sufficient to note here that according to the Gita, mind and intellect belong to our embodied self and are liable to be affected and degraded by our sensuous experience, unless they are constantly kept under the search-light of our higher or the real self, which is a portion of the *Cosmic* self, pervading the whole universe. Before, however, we go to the subject of the Universal Self, it is essential to see in what sense the various terms such as *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* as well as other expressions which we frequently meet with in the Gita are used. It is impossible to appreciate its teaching, unless we have a clear idea of these terms as used in the context in the exposition of the doctrine of *Yoga*. That takes us to the Epistemology of the Gita.

४. समेकांशो जीव लोके जीवभूतः ह्यनात्मनः

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CHAPTER IV

EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE GITA

IT is one of man's imperfections that he has to convey his ideas through words, which may have different meanings or for which there may be no exactly corresponding words in other languages. The Sanskrit language is one of the most precise and polished languages in the world and still, its words are capable of different interpretations and are often difficult to be properly translated into other languages. The Gita contains several such words which are used in different senses and the exact meaning has to be ascertained from their context. The words *Buddhi*, *Jnana*, *Bhakti*, *Karma*, *Yoga*, and *Atman* may be taken as examples. The word *Buddhi* is generally used in the sense of intellect, i.e. faculty of reason. But it is also used in some places in the Gita in the sense of knowledge which is the product of *Buddhi*. (III 1; II 39). In II 41, the words have been used twice in different meanings. In the first line, it is used in the sense of discriminatory reason and in the second, in the sense of desire. The highest quality of *Buddhi* is described as discriminative reason in XVIII 30 where *Satvika-Buddhi* is defined.

The meaning of the word *Jnana* requires to be properly appreciated. Ordinarily it means knowledge of any kind. But the English word 'knowledge' is inadequate to express the different shades of meaning in which the word is used in the Gita. 'Knowledge' is generally used in the sense of information obtained

by reading, hearing or seeing. But that is not the sense in which the Gita uses the word *Jnana*. It is used in the sense of digested or integrated knowledge. It is also used in the sense of practical knowledge or wisdom. *Jnana* also means the highest or philosophic knowledge as opposed to *Vijnana* which means knowledge of a particular subject only. Technically speaking, however, *Jnana* does not mean knowledge in the sense of what is to be known. What is to be known is called *Jneya*, that is, the object of knowledge and knowledge is the instrument or the qualities of mind and reason, by which the object is known by the *Jnata*, i.e. the knower. Thus when the Gita describes in XIII 5 to 11, the various qualities which are said to constitute *Jnana*, they are meant to be the means or the qualifications for knowing that which is to be really known.

This is quite in consonance with the Yoga doctrine of the Gita in which *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* are integrated with each other and also with the Vedanta principle that a part cannot be known unless we know the whole of which it is an organic part. That is why knowledge in its real sense, i.e. *Satvika* knowledge is very aptly described in XVIII 20 as follows:—"Know that knowledge to be *Satvika* by which the one undestructible substance is seen in all beings inseparate in the separated." This is the knowledge of philosophy, that is, Science of sciences. But it is not enough that man merely knows the philosophic truth. Unless he integrates that knowledge with his heart and will, i.e. he feels and acts

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according to what he knows, he cannot be said to possess real knowledge. That is why the Gita says that a *Yogi* is superior to a *Jnanin* (VI 46). Here the word *Yogi* means a man of integrated knowledge and a *Jnanin* means a man who possesses mere, i.e. unintegrated knowledge which remains only on the surface of the mind. This integrated knowledge according to the Gita is the practical knowledge or wisdom as summarised in XIII 7 to 11 as covering all the main virtues of human life. It is the kind of knowledge which is lavishly praised in Chapter IV and is compared to a fire which burns the effects of all actions, to a sword which cuts all doubts about the Self and to a raft which enables one to cross the sea of sin. There are many stray passages in the Gita which may lead one to conclude that knowledge alone is sufficient for self-realisation even without devotion or action, and various commentators including Shankaracharya have, therefore, called the Gita as pre-eminently teaching the way of knowledge. But if the Gita is read as a whole, there could be no doubt that although it lays considerable stress on the place of knowledge in self-realisation, it does not divorce it from action or devotion. Neither without true devotion, i.e. single-mindedness for the ideal to be achieved nor without action, i.e. discharge of one's duties, can a man be truly called a man of knowledge according to the Gita. It is true that the Gita does not quite reject the Upanishadic idea that a man of perfect philosophic idea need not do any actions as they do not affect him and the effect of

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Karma is burnt by the fire of knowledge. Such an ideal man, if he exists, may live a life of pure seclusion or retire into a forest but even then, the Gita lays stress on the fact that, as an integral limb of society, even such a man should not give up actions but should devote himself to work for the benefit of his fellow beings. Such a man may have no obligatory duty towards himself but he does owe a duty to humanity. "Verily by action alone, Janaka and others attained perfection; also simply with a view for the guidance of men, thou shouldst perform action" (III 20). Thus does the Gita gently but firmly disapprove of the renunciatory *sanyasa* of Upanishads. If even men who have imbibed perfect knowledge should not completely renounce the world, there is no justification for lesser men to escape from their worldly duties by becoming Sadhus and Sanyasis. A true *Jnana Yogi* should also be a *Karma Yogi*, says the Gita.

The meaning of the term *Bhakti*, as used in the Gita, must also be properly understood. In popular language that word means devotion with a predominant emotional element in it. In the Gita it is primarily used in the sense of single-minded devotion by contemplation and concentration. It is the purging of the mind of all unsteady forces and fixing it steadfastly on the goal which is to be attained, that constitutes the essence of *Bhakti*. If the divine element in man is to be realised, it cannot be done by mere knowledge of scriptural text books or by doing sacrificial rites and ceremonies but by *Ananya*,

i.e. single-minded introspective meditation and by selfless actions as offerings to the divine will. Knowledge and action have both their proper places in such *Bhakti*. The whole of Chapter XII and a number of verses in Chapter XVIII are devoted in explaining this truth. Whether it is necessary to have the abstract unmanifested Absolute or the manifested Ishvara before our mind for practising such meditative devotion, is a question which we will consider later on, when we go to the Metaphysics of the Gita. We are here concerned primarily with the real meaning of the word *Bhakti* as used in the Gita. When we say that single-minded meditation is the essence of *Bhakti*, it is important to note that every singleness of purpose is not *Bhakti*. Attachment to an object by good or bad feelings is also actuated by singleness of purpose. A man who loves another is attached to him by ties of love but a man who hates another is also attached to him by ties of hatred and in both, love as well as hatred, the attachment may be so strong that he may not think of anything else. So also a drunkard is so much attached to his drink that he does not think of anything else. Such attachment to persons and sensuous objects by feelings of likes or dislikes, love or hate, is *Asakti* (attachment) and not *Bhakti*; although, in both, there is the common element of single-mindedness. The essence of *Bhakti* lies in devotion to the ideal of self-realisation or self-surrender by which the self is purged of its lower and animal qualities and its innate higher

nature becomes strong enough to direct our mental faculties. For that purpose, it is necessary that devotion must be allied with knowledge and good actions, just as knowledge must be combined with devotion and good actions. That is the real *Bhakti Yoga* of the Gita. It is commonly supposed that the emotional element must be predominant in devotion and that it is a quality of heart and not of head. In the later Bhagavata Purana Shri Krishna who expounded the Gita to Arjuna has expounded this aspect of devotion to Uddhava. Still later on, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Vallabhacharya, Nimbaraka, and other commentators of the Gita have developed their exposition on the basis that *Bhakti* is of the essence of the Gita's teachings just as Shankaracharya saw in it the predominant position of *Jnana* and still later on, in recent times, Lokamanya Tilak and others have seen in it the preponderance of *Karma Marga* or the Way of Actions. It is a peculiar characteristic of the Gita which should not be lost sight of, that it does not impart its teachings in logical syllogisms or argumentative discussions. The various commentaries on the Gita contain subtle reasoning and learned discussions which are conspicuous by their absence in the Gita itself. It has placed several aspects of the problem before the reader who may approach it from his own mental angle. In doing this, the author of the Gita has shown a deep knowledge of human psychology. Human faculties are not developed to the same extent in all men. Some men are born with a brilliant intellect, some with deep emotions and some

with strong will and all men have thus unequal development of all the three faculties. And still every man is required to reach the summit of self-realisation. It is just like trying to reach the top of a mountain from different sides. One side may be very steep, but it takes a short time but more strength to reach the top. The other side is less steep and requires a longer time but less energy to reach it while the third side is a slow up-gradient which takes a very long time to reach, but it is easier than the other two. All the sides, however, ultimately take us to the top. Each person requires to be shown the way to reach the top which is most suited to him and that is the best way for him. The standard is not absolute but relative to a man's capacity. If all men are shown the same steep path, very few can reach the top and if all are shown the most winding path, although some are capable of following the more difficult paths, the latter will not enjoy the tedious journey and may give it up altogether. That is why the Gita has exhibited the several aspects or ways which each man may follow according to his inclinations.

But this comparison, however, is imperfect and stops here. As opposed to all paths of reaching the mountain top which are only mechanically connected with each other, the three paths of our mental faculties are so organically related that the one cannot be separated from the other without detriment to each of them. The development of each must therefore keep pace with that of the others. That is the gist of the Yoga Doctrine of the Gita. Whether one

follows any one of the paths of knowledge, devotion or dutiful actions first, the other two should also be tried as far as one can and in the natural course of events, each path will help in making progress in the other two also. The condition precedent for following any one of the three paths is that the mind should be purified by self-control and regulation of passions and desires and for that purpose, the Gita repeatedly lays stress on mental discipline. "*Yoga* is hard to be attained by one of uncontrolled self." (VI 36). If that is achieved, it does not matter by which of the three paths you proceed first, because ultimately you will arrive at the same goal. The laws of inner nature will take you from the one to the others. For example, if a man begins with devotion and learns to fix up his mind by concentrative contemplation of the ultimate reality, the latent strength of his intellect will begin to grow and the acquisition of *Jnana* will be easier. "By devotion he knows me in reality, what and who I am; then having known me in reality, he forthwith enters into me." (XVIII 55). So also his will-power can become firmer with knowledge and will acquire the gift of doing good actions without desiring for their fruits. "All action in its entirety attains its consummation in knowledge." (IV 33).

There are various passages in the Gita in which this interconnection between the three faculties is emphasised. We have seen above that *Jnana* does not mean mere knowledge, but knowledge integrated with devotion and firmness of will (VII 17). Similarly devotion must be combined with action. "Those who

worship me resigning all actions in me, regarding me as the supreme goal, meditating on me with single-minded *Yoga*, to those whose mind is set on me, verily I become ere long, the Saviour out of the ocean of the vast *Samsara*." (XII 6, 7).

Devotion must not be merely emotional but should be combined with *Buddhi Yoga* (X 10, 11). Thus the intellectual and the contemplative elements in *Bhakti* according to the Gita are more important than the emotional and ecstatic elements which sometimes paralyse our actions. *Bhakti* is thus used in a special sense just like *Jnana*.

The word *Karma* is used mainly in the sense of enjoined actions. That is the sense in which it is used, in the well-known verse 'Thy right is to work only; but never to the fruits thereof.' (II 47) and also 'therefore do thou always perform actions which are obligatory without attachment, etc.' (III 19). The best, that is *Satvika Karma*, is described thus: "An ordained action done without love or hatred by one not desirous of the fruit and free from attachment is declared to be *Satvika* (XVIII 23). It must be noted that *Karma* here does not merely include religious observances enjoined by the scriptures but all the obligatory actions for the good of the society as may amount to duty from time to time in varying circumstances. The word *Karma* is also used in the general sense of any action, good or bad, as in "The fire of knowledge reduces all *Karma* to ashes." (IV 37). The connection between *Karma* and *Bhakti* is shown in XII 6 and that between *Karma* and *Buddhi*

in XVIII 5-7 and in II 50. Another meaning of *Karma* is the accumulation of our actions in this as well as in previous lives in what is known as *Karma Vada* or the theory of *Karma* to which we shall come later on.

It will thus appear that the terms *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma* are used in various senses in the Gita and we have to find out the meaning every time from the context in which they appear. It is important to note that all these terms are mutually related as the three faculties of mind cannot be divorced from each other.

We next come to the word *Yoga*. As observed before, that word is also used in various senses. Primarily, it means joining or union. Secondly, it has various shades of meaning such as equilibrium, balance, synthesis, or integration and regulation and control of bodily and mental faculties. In the sentence '*Yoga* is called *Samatvam*' (II 48), it means balance or equilibrium, secured by mental discipline. It is also used in the sense of art or device as in '*Yoga* is proficiency in doing *Karma*' (II 50). In V 56 and some other places its meaning is restricted to performance of actions as compared with *Sankhya*, i.e. knowledge. And that has led some commentators to believe that the main doctrine of the Gita is *Karma-Yoga*. However, the word *Yoga* is also combined with *Buddhi* and *Jnana*, *Karma* as well as *Bhakti* as in XVIII 57, III 3, 37 and in Chapter XII and in other places. At first sight, this may seem to be gathered from VI 46 where it is stated that the *Yogi* is superior to a *Tapasvi*, i.e. ascetic, to a *Jnanin*, i.e. a man who has mere knowledge of sacred books, and also a *Karmin*, i.e. a

person who merely performs ceremonial rites. Here the integrated sense of the word *Yoga* is clearly brought out and it is quite consistent with the general tenor of the whole Gita. These different senses of the word *Yoga* have furnished ample scope to the various commentators of the Gita who have read in it their preconceived ideas and opinions, but looking to the general tenor of the book, the only reasonable meaning that can be ascribed to that term is that *Yoga* is the union of all the three—*Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma*—with a subjective emphasis on one of them according to the mental development of each individual. In this way, each man may search for that particular kind of *Yoga* which is best suited to him. This *Yoga* for a man of confused intellect is described in II 53. *Yoga* for a man who is engaged in religious observances is mentioned in VI 44. Everywhere, there is emphasis on the organic unity of mind and its faculties which should not be disrupted but strengthened by three-sided progress. If a diamond is cut and shaped into three faces, the appearance of each face becomes brighter by the light coming through the other two faces and the whole diamond presents a symmetrical appearance. Similarly, the human mind attains its maximum strength and beauty by bringing all its faculties into activity. That is the path which leads to self-realisation as well as salvation. If a man is determined to achieve that end, the laws of Nature which operate in the inner life of man will assist him in doing so, because that is indeed the natural way. Neither mere suppression of passions and desires, nor

a life of rigorous asceticism, nor mere knowledge of nature, nor mere emotional effusion of mind, nor adherence to religious rites and ceremonies, nor running away from his duties, will enable a man to fulfil the mission of his life. The only sure way for the fulfilment of that mission is *Yoga* which is in conformity with the laws of outward as well as inward nature. Such *Yoga* is the real art of life.

We now come to the last and most important term in the Gita, namely *Atman*. Its primary meaning is "Self"—that which a thing really is. Its derivative meaning is the essence or soul of a being, behind its outward manifestations—that which remains the same in spite of its changing qualities and attributes. Everything—whether animate or inanimate—has *Atman* which pervades all its manifestations. This cosmic soul is called *Saguna*, that is, manifested *Brahman*. This is the basic principle of the whole Vedic, including the Upanishadic philosophy and is the foundation of its super-structure. The Gita which contains the quintessence of the Upanishads deals with this subject in its own descriptive and unargumentative way at different places, especially in Chapters II, XIII and XV. Before we go into that, it is necessary to understand the different shades of meaning in which the word *Atman* is used. We have seen before that human nature is divided into lower and higher, that is physical and animal on the one hand and mental or spiritual on the other (VII 4, 5). The self of a man is therefore twofold—lower and higher. The senses, mind and intellect belong to the lower and material

side of his life and the soul which is called "He" in III 42 belongs to the higher spiritual side. But both are also called by the same name, *Atman*. That is because these two sides or aspects belong to the same (embodied) soul in a human being. Again we have to refer to the context in which the term is used, for finding out its exact sense. It is sometimes used in both senses in the same verse; e.g. "A man should uplift himself by his own self, so let him not weaken this self. For this self is the friend of one's self and this self is the enemy of one's self. The self is the friend of the self, for him who has conquered himself by this self. But to the unconquered self, this self is inimical like foe (VI 5, 6). 'Seeing the self by the self, one is satisfied in his own self.' (VI 20). "When a man completely casts away all the desires of the mind, satisfied in the self alone by the self, then he is said to be one of steady wisdom." (II 55). "Thus knowing him who is superior to the intellect and restraining the self by the self, etc." (III 43). These passages accentuate the contrast between the lower and the higher self, although both are aspects of one and the same self. We have now to take up the subject about the nature of the *Atman* as the higher self, which in essence, is the same as the Brahman, the real Absolute Self. That leads us to the cosmology as well as the metaphysics of the Gita. 28-1-52

CHAPTER V

COSMOLOGY OF THE GITA

THE ancient seers of the world knew it as they directly experienced it in their life and made up, by their intuition and imagination, what they could not know directly. They had not learnt to fathom mysteries of nature by dissecting and subjecting it to experimental observations by the scientific methods of the present day. Their method was one of direct observation, meditation and imagination. The young mind of mankind saw in nature the reflection of personality as it experienced it in itself. Their knowledge of heavenly bodies like the sun, moon, planets and stars was based on imagination and much of it has now become obsolete by the progress of scientific investigations. But one great achievement of the Indo-Aryans which remains outstanding to this day in the domain of philosophy has been their inspired intuition that there is one Absolute Reality which pervades and permeates the whole cosmos, behind all its fleeting phenomena. The Absolute is the universal soul or *Purusha* of which the whole *Prakriti* or Nature is an untoward manifestation. As we have seen above, this idea, dim as it was in the earlier Vedas, became brighter and brighter with the development of the meditative thought and is enshrined in the Upanishads. We may give any name to this Reality and call it the Absolute, Soul, Spirit, Energy or God. The Upanishadic philosophers called it Brahman. Their profound meditation took them

to the conclusion that everything that exists has a beginning, continuance and end, but the end is not of its inner substance but only of its form and name. The substance continues to exist amidst all the changes of its outward forms, that whatever appears to end or disintegrate does not therefore absolutely die, but reappears in a different combination of the elements of nature and after a time again disintegrates and thus the cycle goes on till—as we cannot say how long—we say eternity. They further found that our *Buddhi* (Reason) takes us to the conclusion that whatever is an effect must have a cause till we come to a causeless cause or First Cause, that whatever is liable to change and appears in relation to other things is a relative which presupposes an Absolute. Whatever assumes different appearance from time to time and is thus transitory, is ephemeral and unreal which presupposes that there must be a Reality of which these are all appearances. The light of self-conscious reason in created beings like men pre-supposes that this Absolute must be an effulgent light transcending the self-conscious nature of men and embedded as a latent Force in the whole cosmic creation. When we say, 'creation' it does not mean that it was all created at one time and is to be destroyed also at one time. It is a continuous creation in which appearance, continuance and disintegration or birth, life and death are only different stages in the same process, moving in repeated cycles. Nothing disintegrates or dies absolutely but merges in the flux of the cosmic entity to reappear or be reborn in another form. It

lives, moves and has its being in the Brahman which is a macrocosm of which each soul is a microcosm. In essence, therefore, *Atman* is the same as *Brahman*. As such, it is the subject of knowledge and not an object which can be perceived merely by the senses or intellect like all natural phenomena. It cannot, therefore, be known by the same method by which objects can be known. In that sense, it cannot be known at all but only be realised by one's self in his own self, by introspection and meditation. It cannot be comprehended but only apprehended because the Absolute Reality can have no qualities or attributes by which we can comprehend it but we can only feel its presence by mental apprehension.

This subject has been pithily but vividly dealt with in the Kenopanishad. It says "It is the *Atman*, the Spirit, by whose power the ear hears, the eye sees, the tongue speaks, the mind understands and life functions. The wise man separates the *Atman* from these faculties, rises out of sense life and attains immortality". (I 2). It says further "That alone is *Brahman* which speech cannot reveal but what reveals speech, what mind does not comprehend but what cognises the mind, what the sight fails to see but what perceives sight, what hearing fails to grasp but what perceives hearing and what life does not enliven but what directs life". In a loose sense, we know it but in the real sense we do not know it. This is very lucidly expressed by the same Upanishad in a dialogue between the pupil and the preceptor. The pupil says about the *Brahman*: "I do not think,

I know well. But not that I do not know: I know too. Who amongst us comprehends it both as the not-unknown and as the known—he comprehends it”. The preceptor replies “He understands It not, who conceives It. It is the “Unknown” to the man of pre-knowledge, but to the ignorant, It is known. (II 2, 3). In other words, as it has been well put, “It is strange how much one has got to know before one knows how little he knows.”

How strikingly true this is can be very well seen from the Upanishads themselves. The Upanishads are not a coherent and consistent system of uniform reasoning. They belong to each of the four Vedas and were composed in the course of several centuries, by different seers. The doctrine of *Brahman* or *Atman* being the same in the cosmic and the individual selves is no doubt common to all Upanishads, but there is a great diversity between the older and the later Upanishads about the exact nature of *Brahman* and its relation to *Prakriti*, i.e. the phenomenal world. The main doctrine which they embody is called Vedanta but within that doctrine there are different views which were developing in the course of centuries of changing thoughts. The conception of *Brahman* as the sole reality and as being without any attributes or qualities, carried to its logical conclusion develops into a pure non-dualism in which the world of *Prakriti* is a mere appearance. Besides, we cannot bring the idea of *Brahman* into the limited circle of our mind without attributing some quality to it. It only remains as a Principle to which even

no gender could be attributed. We have to express it in the neuter gender and call it "that" or "it" because gender belongs to the created world. Moreover we cannot say with logical precision whether the world is *Brahman* itself or whether the *Brahman*, after having created it, enters into it as its soul; then again whether *Prakriti* is partly real and partly unreal, what is the exact relation between *Brahman* and *Prakriti*? If *Brahman* is a *Purusha* or Lord, how is it consistent with its being without any quality or attributes? All these fundamental questions have baffled the human mind from its infancy and will continue to do so in every age and in every system of philosophy. The answers to these questions will always remain more or less controversial. If *Brahman* is absolutely unknowable, no one need bother about it, but the human mind cannot escape from the conclusion to which even the modern scientists have at last arrived, that there is one element which keeps the whole nature together by its inexorable laws. After all the scientific conclusion also depends on a faith, though a rational faith, that the laws of nature which are in force today will also remain so tomorrow. Although, therefore, there is ample scope for holding different views on the relation between that one element or *Brahman* and created nature, this fact should not deter us from believing in the existence of a unitary Principle in the whole universe which works according to fixed laws, the understanding of which constitutes our real knowledge. At the same time, we need not and should not refuse to appreciate

B.G.—4.

the different views which are bound to arise on such obstruse problems. We may adopt any one of them which appeals to our individual reason, provided we do not lose sight of the fundamental basis common to all. Such an attitude fixes our mind and sustains our faith to reach the goal which could be reached by adopting any one of the views, because whatever may be the hidden truth about the real nature of the Absolute Reality, it is enough for us if we know the laws through which it rules the universe and which we are bound to follow. And that is just what the Gita preaches.

We must, however, see what the various views are in order to understand the Gita. The logical view is the idealist view of absolute non-dualism which was later expounded with force and forensic ability by Shankaracharya, several centuries later on. This view ascribes reality to *Brahman* alone, by knowing which everything is known because everything else is unreal compared to it and appears to be real to us on account of our ignorance or *Avidya*. "There is nothing other than it in this world" says the Brihadaraynakopanishad (IV 4-19) and Kathopanishad (IV 10-11). This extreme position is modified by the former Upanishad itself by saying that the manifested world is relatively real and therefore *Brahman* is the "Reality of realities" or Truth of Truths (II 1-20) which means that the world is not wholly unreal. Chhandogyopanishad identifies the manifold universe with the *Brahman* when it says "Verily, the whole of this (world) is *Brahman*". (III 14-1).

In order to harmonise this theory of the universe being itself the *Brahman*, the theory of creation adopted by most of the Upanishads is that *Brahman* created the Universe from its own self and then entered into it as its soul. It is compared to a spider drawing out the materials for the web from its own body, then weaving it and entering into it and again withdrawing it into its own self. At the same time, there was the non-dualistic theory that *Brahman* alone is real and the world is non-real. Side by side with the absolute non-dualistic theory of *Brahman* being an unmanifested and unknowable abstract principle, we find a parallel theory from the early Upanishads which was developed in the later ones, in which *Brahman* was personified and regarded as *Purusha*, *Isha*, *Ishwara* (Lord) and *Parameshwara*. The 'It' or 'That' became 'He'. *Purusha*, however, does not mean "Man". Its English translation would be "person" but it does not mean a human person but a Supreme Soul residing in the whole cosmic body. Proceeding a step further, he was called *Ishwara* (Lord), i.e. the Ruler or Law-giver. There is a natural transition from Creator to a Law-giver and still further to Preserver and Destroyer. Once the personal element is introduced, the *Brahman* ceases to be a pure Absolute without qualities or attributes but becomes God with all the qualities of Creator, Ruler and Law-giver. The climax is reached in the later Svetasvatara Upanishad where the transition from pantheism to theism becomes most marked and the epithet 'Rudra' or 'Hara' or 'Shiva'

is given to *Ishwara* in anticipation, as it were, of the Shaivaite cult. It must be noted, however, that nowhere in the Upanishads is *Brahman* or *Ishwara* described in terms of a human being or to be worshipped by its image. Although from the abstract notion of *Brahman* we come to a concrete notion of a Lord or Law-giver, he still remains a concept and not an idol. 29-1-52

Another apparent inconsistency to be found in the Upanishads is about the relation of the universal to the individual soul. The purely non-dualistic theory is the identity of the individual with the Universal Soul. "That art Thou and Thou art That" proclaims the Upanishads.

The general simile given is that of the space occupied by a pot. Just as a clay pot encloses a portion of eternal space which is the same as the outside space, so the body encloses a portion of the cosmic *Brahman* which is the same as the outside *Brahman* and just as the enclosed space is merged in the outside space when the pot is broken, so does the individual soul merge into the universal soul after its gross body ceases to cover it. This theory logically implies that the embodied soul and universal soul are not separate and distinct entities but portions of one and the same soul. However, their comparison to two friendly birds sitting on the bough of a tree which appears in Svetasvatara and Mundaka Upanishads and which is borrowed from the Rig Veda implies that there are two distinct entities in spite of their original identity. One of the birds

(embodied soul) tastes the sweet fruit of the tree while the other (Universal soul) looks on without eating. The conception of two separate entities in one body cannot be reconciled with the absolute identity of both the souls. Hence here again we come to the same difficulty which we found in the relation between *Brahman* and the created cosmos.

All these inconsistencies arise on account of the difficulty which our limited intellect feels in trying to describe what is indescribable, in terms of language which can only apply to finite objects. The abstract infinite and eternal can never be expressed in terms of the concrete, finite and transitory. That is a pitfall of every philosophical system even today and for ever. That is why according to Vedanta Philosophy, the *Brahman* cannot be known by argument, discourse or discussion. It can only be realised by introspection and meditation. Says Kathopanishad (IV 12, 13) :

“Not by speech, not by thought,
Not by sight is he comprehended;
‘He is’ by this word, is he comprehended,
And in no other way.
‘He is’ thus may he be apprehended,
In as far as he is the essence of both;
‘He is’ to the man who has thus apprehended him,
His essential nature becomes manifest.”

A crude attempt was made to cut this Gordian knot by a School of Indian Philosophy started by Kapila Muni, the founder of the Sankhya system. According to him, both *Prakriti* (Nature) as well

as *Purusha* (spirit or soul) were real, eternal and independent of each other. *Prakriti* is active and contains within itself the cause of change and flux while the *Purusha* is passive and is a mere looker-on and non-enjoyer. Man's trouble arises when both are united together and the *Purusha* becomes debased by this union. The essence of salvation lies in separating them from each other by getting knowledge of the nature of both. On this foundation, Kapila Muni raised a complex superstructure of speculative thought and attempted, though without success, to solve the riddle created by the supposed unreality of the universe propounded by some of the Upanishads. It attracted several thinkers who were repelled by the inexorable logic of the pure non-dualistic view but they in turn could not explain how matter derived force from within itself and how two eternal and conflicting elements can stand side by side without a common principle.

What then, does the Gita say about the nature of *Brahman* and the problems it created? The Gita is said to contain the quintessence of the Upanishads. But from what we have seen, it is not an easy task to reconcile their divergent views. The Gita does not attempt to do so by any metaphysical argumentation. It takes a bold and unique line by stating these views and trying to reconcile them on the psychological, rather than on the metaphysical plane. Its partiality is no doubt for the fundamental doctrine of the Upanishads that there is one universal soul pervading the whole universe, which in its real

nature is imperishable, indefinable, unmanifested, omnipresent, unchangeable and eternal. (XII 3). "Om, Tat, Sat—this has been declared to be the triple designation of *Brahman*" (XVII 23), if it can be designated at all. "The imperishable is the supreme *Brahman*. Its dwelling in each individual body is called *Adhyatma*" (VIII 3). "All this world is pervaded by Me in my manifested form: all beings exist in me, but I do not dwell in them" (IX 4), but then the Gita says further "Nor do beings exist in Me, behold my Divine *Yoga*. Bringing forth and supporting the beings, Myself does not dwell in them" (IX 5), because, "just as the wind moving always everywhere rests even in space, all beings rest in Me (without producing any effect on Me)" (IX 6). This is transcendental as opposed to the pantheistic view of *Brahman*.

Having stated the real nature of *Brahman* as it appears to be, the Gita limits its realisation only by the *Yogis* "because of their perfectly tranquil mind with passions quieted, free from taint, with the heart concentrated by *yoga* with the eyes of evenness for all things and beholding the self in all beings and all beings in the self" (VI 27 to 30). But this mystical realisation is extremely difficult for ordinary men. "Greater is their trouble whose minds are set on the Unmanifested; for the goal of the Unmanifested is very hard for the embodied to reach" (XII 5). On the principle that the easier is the better, the Gita recommends to the common man that as he cannot become a *yogi* all at once, the best

course for him is to adopt the method most suitable to his mental capacity from among several alternatives. He must concentrate and fix his mind on the *Brahman*; if he cannot do that, he must learn to withdraw his mind inwards and fix it on one object by the exercise of *Yoga*; If he cannot do that, he should learn to do all his work and duties with the consciousness that he is doing all that, as an offering to God and if he cannot do even that, he must, by self-control, learn to do all acts disinterestedly abandoning the desire to get their fruits (XII 8 to 11). Then comes the summarised version of this alternative process which is the crux of the Gita's teachings to the common man. "Better (because easier) is knowledge than mere mental exercise; better is concentration than knowledge, but better than concentration is the renunciation of the fruits of action. Because peace (of mind) immediately follows renunciation". (XII 12). Thus according to the Gita, the realisation of the abstract *Brahman* is for the *Yogi* and not for the common man who need not bother himself with this unattainable ideal for him, but should adopt other alternatives as they are all instrumental in giving him happiness as well as salvation. At the same time, it is at least necessary for him to know that although the *Brahman* as such is unknowable, its reflections in the cosmic world is not only knowable in the external world but also in his own consciousness. Thus the Gita adopts the view that for the common man, the cosmic manifested *Brahman*, i.e. *Saguna Brahman* is as real as

the Absolute unmanifested *Brahman*, i.e. *Nirguna Brahman* is to the *yogi* because both are two different aspects of the same *Brahman*. This is in accordance with the view of one of the most important Upanishads, Brihadaranyakopanishad; "*Brahman* has but two forms—gross and subtle, Mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, defined and undefined." (II 3-1). The same Upanishad calls *Brahman* 'the Reality of realities', the second 'reality' meaning the relative reality. This is a modified position of the other view that *Brahman* is the sole reality and nothing else is true and real. It is quite true, as we shall see later on, that in the Gita also, these two views of *Brahman* appear in different places and consequently there are apparent contradictions. But the main difference between the Upanishads and the Gita on this point is that while in the former there is one-way traffic for all, the Gita points out different ways for different persons according to their mental capacity in apprehending reality. The Gita has tried to provide a practical solution for the difficulties created by the absolute standard of the Upanishads, by applying the principle of Relativity to religious philosophy.

Once the difficulty of comprehending the Absolute *Brahman* is surmounted and the cosmos is regarded as the embodied form or aspect of *Brahman*, the transition from 'It' or 'That' to 'He', from principle to *Purusha* (person), from *Purusha* to *Ishwara* and from *Ishwara* to *Parameshwara* is as simple as it is inevitable because then we can imagine all the

highest qualities and attributes as residing in the Cosmic Self and the Gita rises to the highest flights of sublime poetic imagination in its description of the Universal Spirit. But let us wait awhile for that till we complete the Metaphysics of the Gita.

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CHAPTER VI

METAPHYSICS OF THE GITA

THE term "Metaphysics" as applied to the Gita should be properly understood. In modern times, when nature is studied in separate compartments, each science is looked upon as self-sufficient and the connection between them is left to be considered as a separate subject with which the scientists are not concerned. As a result of that, there is, as it were, a no-man's land between the different sciences and especially between physical Science and Metaphysics. The former is studied by observation and experimental researches while the latter is left to speculative thought. The scientists did not concern themselves with the implications of their conclusions in the metaphysical sphere while metaphysicians regarded the researches of sciences as foreign to their jurisdiction. Each regarded its own conclusions as true independently of the others. It is only in recent times that eminent scientists have realised that if their conclusions require to be co-ordinated for finding out the ultimate truths of nature, they cannot stop with the partial truths which the various sciences had established, but that there must be an integration of all these truths which ultimately lead us to their metaphysical foundations. But the ancient thinkers saw the whole nature as one. They had not probed deep into the different branches of physical nature to find out its mysterious working. But their ignorance of the depths of nature was partly made

up by their vision of the whole. It is true, their knowledge of the whole was not scientific as we conceive it today. It was much more intuitive than rational and deductive. But in the infancy of the human mind that was inevitable and we cannot judge them by modern standards of acquiring knowledge. In our deep quest of knowledge of nature, we have acquired the habit of analytical thought which often disables us from taking a synthetic view of the world, with the result that very few care to study the animate and inanimate world as a whole. Numerous as their other disabilities were, the ancients did not suffer from that disability. Their physics, and metaphysics, psychology and physiology, philosophy and religion were all one—different aspects of one whole and knowledge consisted in knowing the whole in which all its parts were known. That is how the Gita described *Satvika* or superior knowledge “that by which the one indestructible substance is seen in all beings, inseparate in the separated, know that knowledge to be *Satvika*” (XVIII 20). “When he sees the separated existence of all beings inherent in the one, and their expansion from that alone, he then becomes *Brahman*” (XIII 30). The analytic method is called *Rajasika* or inferior knowledge and the method in which the part is mistaken for the whole is *Tamasika* or the lowest kind of knowledge. There is no doubt that the real philosophical way of getting knowledge is that in which physics and metaphysics are integrated together. If this is accepted, it must be admitted that although the contents of the

separate sciences are much more known today than they were ever in the past and known by a rational method, the approach to acquire the highest, i.e. integrated knowledge made by the Gita remains correct and scientific today, and with our rapidly advancing knowledge of nature it is more useful at present than it was ever before. The more we know of natural forces, the greater is the need to find out the common source of energy and the laws of its working, and whether the ultimate form of the energy is material or spiritual. The recent researches in atomic energy and Einstein's Theory of Relativity have led several eminent scientists to conclude that matter is nothing but crystallised energy or spirit and that behind all relative phenomena, there must be an Absolute in the universe. It is not necessary to dilate on this point here as that subject is so important that I propose to devote a separate chapter to it. One important point should be noted here about the difference in the method of approach made by the Gita and the Upanishads on the one hand and the approach of the present scientific age. The propounders of the Vedanta doctrine arrived at the conviction of the all-pervading Brahman by intuition and meditation and then started downwards to construct their psychology, ethics, religion, etc., on that fundamental basis while in the present age when we are not inclined to take anything for granted by mere thought, we have to work upwards from the laws of each separate science to their co-ordination among themselves and see whether we can arrive at

any First Principle which manifests itself in the universe in various forms. If we can come to that conclusion, we have to ask ourselves whether the Absolute which we postulate by rational faith resembles the Absolute which the Indian philosophers established by intuition and inspiration.

As we saw in the last Chapter, the two important metaphysical schools of thought prevalent at the time when the Gita was written was the Vedanta School of Upanishads and the Sankhya School of Kapila Muni. The latter was a reaction against the extreme non-dualism of the former and had become popular among people who were not attracted by the supposed Vedanta theory of the non-reality of the material world. According to the Sankhya system, *Prakriti*, i.e. imperceptible and homogeneous matter and *Purusha*, i.e. Spirit or Soul, were two eternal, independent and self-created principles. *Prakriti* contained within itself the element of activity by which it assumed different forms. Its homogeneity was destroyed on account of its three constituent qualities, namely, *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Satva* represents equilibrium, *Rajas*, activity and *Tamas*, inertia. Each material object contains all these three elements one of which is more predominant than the others. The predominance determines the quality of the thing and the goodness of the individual. *Satva* represents goodness and equability of mind, *Rajas* represents activity generated by desires and passions and *Tamas*, ignorance as well as stupefaction. In terms of moral values, *Satva* is good and takes a person upwards

on the moral scale. *Rajas* is middling and keeps him where he is and *Tamas* is bad and drags him down. (XIV 18). This doctrine of *gunas*, as it was called, was popular and was recognised even by the Vedanta School. The Gita has given a permanent place to it in its psychological and moral scheme and ever since then, it has become one of the principal doctrines of Hindu Philosophy. The homogeneity of the imperceptible primordial matter is destroyed by the activities of the *gunas* and takes the perceptible form which is merged at the end of the cycle of years again into primordial matter. This doctrine would be purely materialistic but for the belief in the existence of the *Purusha* which also exists as an independent and eternal element side by side with matter. The contact between matter and spirit gives rise to life and consciousness which is destroyed when they are separated. It must be noted that according to this doctrine, it is not *Purusha* that infuses activity into matter. The germ of activity is there already and the contact between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* creates an illusion or egoism in the mind of the former as if it is he who creates activities and does all actions. The *Purusha* is purely passive. He knows but does not act; He looks but is apathetic; He enjoys but is not affected; He illuminates but does not change. Whatever change comes into bodily activities (and all mental activities are activities of the subtle body) by contact with *Purusha* is caused by *Prakriti* itself and not by soul. However, the soul does illuminate, direct and guide the activities of the mind and body.

It is like the distant sun which illuminates the earth and is the cause of the changes produced by the effects of its light and heat on account of the contact of its rays with the earth, without being itself affected by these changes. This doctrine of passivity of the soul is accepted by the Gita and by the Vedanta also but while the Sankhya system does not accept the universal soul of which the bodily souls are constituent elements and is satisfied with a multiple of individual souls which contact the body and get their deliverance by leaving it, the Upanishadic Vedanta starts with the Universal soul which is the only Reality as *Prakriti* is merely its cosmic form. In its true eclectic manner, the Gita partly adopts the Sankhya doctrine of the nature of *Prakriti* and *Purusha* but superimposes on it the Vedantic doctrine of the universal Absolute, thus subordinating *Prakriti* as well as individual souls to the universal soul. The Gita accepts the Sankhya doctrine that all the manifestations proceed from the unmanifested state (VIII 18), but it goes beyond that and says, following the Upanishads, that beyond this unmanifested, there is that other Unmanifested, Eternal existence—that which is not destroyed at all at the destruction of all beings” (VIII 20).

The Sankhya system seems to have been so widely prevalent, that the word “Sankhya” itself had come to mean knowledge generally and the Gita has used that word sometimes in the sense of knowledge or philosophy and sometimes in the sense of this particular system. Thus Sankhya has been used for knowledge in general in III 3 and V 5 and for the

Sankhya system in XVIII 19. The Gita expresses the Vedanta view when it says "All this world is pervaded by Me in My unmanifested form; all beings exist in Me but I do not dwell in them" (IX 4) and "Animating my *Prakriti* I project again and again this whole multitude of beings, helpless under the sway of *Prakriti*" (IX 8, X 20) and finally "At the end of a *Kalpa*, all beings go back to my *Prakriti*; at the beginning of another *Kalpa* I send them forth again" (IX 7). The same idea is expressed in another form in Chapter XIII where *Prakriti* is called *Kshetra*, i.e. 'field' or body and the soul is called *Kshetragna*, i.e. the knower of the body. We need not enter into the details of the constituents of *Kshetra* which are borrowed from the Sankhya system in XIII 5, 6. But it is important to note that although both *Prakriti* and *Purusha* are called beginningless and all *gunas* are said to be borne of *Prakriti* in XIII 19, it does not mean that both are independent of each other because immediately thereafter in XIII 21 it is stated that *Purusha* sitting in *Prakriti* experiences the *gunas* born of *Prakriti*. This experience is that of a detached observer as it is described in the next verse "And the supreme *Purusha* in this body is also called the looker on, the Permitter, the Supporter, the Experiencer, the Great Lord and the highest Self." (XIII 22), and also "As the one sun illumines all the world so does He who abides in the *Kshetra* illumines the whole *Kshetra*" (XIII 33). However, "Being without beginning and devoid of *gunas*, this Supreme Self, immutable though existing

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in the body neither acts nor is affected." "As the all-pervading *akasha*, because of its subtlety is not tainted, so the Self existent in the body everywhere, is not tainted" (XIII 31, 32). It follows therefore that "this Self cannot be cut, nor wetted, nor dried. Changeless, all-pervading, unmoving immutable, the Self is Eternal." (II 24). Some readers will find it rather hard to understand how the soul which experiences and enjoys in the body cannot be affected by it. That is one of the difficulties caused by the Gita trying to reconcile the Sankhya with the Vedantic system. The answer given by the Gita is that all beings exist in the cosmic soul and although it brings forth and supports beings, it does not dwell in them. (IX 4, 5; VII 12; X 42). This is no doubt an ambiguous expression but from the general tenor of the Gita and the Upanishadic Vedanta, it appears to refer to the transcendental nature of the Super-soul. If the universal soul is merely immanent in the Universe, i.e. exists in the universe and not outside it, it may be said that there is a real identification between the body and the soul but it is of the very essence of the Vedanta doctrine that the Cosmos is not to be identified with the *Brahman*. It is only a manifestation of *Brahman* which really transcends the Universe. The idea dates back to the Vedas where in the Purusha Sukta it is stated that the *Purusha* extends ten fingers beyond the creation, i.e. its identity is not exhausted in the creation but that it is in and also beyond the Universe. That being so, although the Universe is in the Cosmic soul, the *Brahman*, i.e.

the Absolute is in and beyond the Universe and it being of a transcendental nature, it is not really affected by the *gunas* of *Prakriti* although a portion of the cosmic self which occupies the body appears to be so affected through ignorance. That is explained in (XVI 7). "An eternal portion of Myself having become a living soul in the world of life draws (to itself) the senses with mind for the sixth (sense), abiding in the *Prakriti*." It is really our *Avidya* or ignorance which attributes finite qualities to the transcendental Infinite. The moment we realise that a portion of the transcendental element is in us, as well as the whole Cosmos, we should cease attributing all acts to Him but should do so to the forces of *Prakriti* which are within us. We have an immortal soul in a mortal body and it is the mortal part of our being that acts under the influences of the *gunas* of *Prakriti*. And that is why Krishna advises Arjuna in Chapter II to fight and even kill as a matter of duty, because his immortal soul is not affected by his actions. This is a very subtle doctrine and its meaning should be properly realised as the whole edifice of the Gita is raised on that foundation. We saw in a previous chapter that in each human being, there is a twofold *Prakriti*: the lower *Prakriti* consisting of eight elements including mind and intellect and above and beyond it is the higher *Prakriti*, the principle of self-consciousness by which the universe is sustained (VII 4, 5). We also saw that higher than the senses, mind and intellect, there is 'He' the soul (III 42). This element of self-consciousness of the soul belongs

to the higher self and is the reflection of the cosmic Soul in us. All actions are done by our lower self which is a part of *Prakriti* but there is the illumination of the higher self, latent in us, which though itself passive and non-active, knows and controls our lower self. The searchlight of our higher self is always directed on the lower self but the responsibility for our thoughts and actions is on the lower self which includes mind as well as intellect. It is by our ignorance that we confuse the two selves with each other. But once we realise their true nature, we stop attributing praise or blame to the higher self for acts which are done by the lower self only. The function of the higher self is to direct and guide the lower self by its effulgent light within us and that of the lower self to choose to act or not under that guidance. That is the meaning of the well-known verse about the lifting the self by the self (VI 5) and that the immortal soul in us is not affected by our thoughts and actions, the responsibility for which attaches to our lower self. In other words, the lower self is bound by our *Karma*. The implications of this we will see when we go to the Ethics of the Gita.

This is the gist of the Gita doctrine of the *Prakriti* and *Purusha*; the lower and higher self, *Kshetra* and *Kshetragna*, which is arrived at by making a compromise between the dualism of the Sankhya and the non-dualism of the Vedanta. This is prominently brought out in the three verses in Chapter XIII. "*Prakriti* is said to be the cause in doing of actions and the instruments of actions (organs). *Purusha*

is said to be the cause of experience of pleasure and pain." (XIII 20). A doubt may arise as to what is meant by *Purusha* here. Does it mean the inactive and passive self or the lower, i.e. the body self? Because if *Purusha* is entirely passive, how can we enjoy the pleasure and pain? The answer is given in the next verse. "*Purusha* seated in *Prakriti* experiences the *gunas* born of *Prakriti*. The reason of his birth in good and evil wombs in his attachment to the *gunas*." (XIII 21). This means that *Purusha* by himself is not active but passive and when he is enshrined in a body, his reflection in the body, i.e. *Jeeva* appears to experience all the effects of *Prakriti*, i.e. external and internal nature and the soul is, as it were, identified with the body. But its real nature is different because the soul in the body is, in essence, the same as the transcendental universal self.

This is made clear in the next verse. "And the Supreme *Purusha* in this body is also called the Looker-on, the Permitter, the Supporter, the Experienter, the great Lord and the Highest Self." (XIII 22). This is the Vedanta view superimposed on the *Sankhya* view of *Purusha* in the first two verses. According to *Sankhya*, there is no Supreme Soul. There is only a plurality of individual souls. But according to Vedanta, the real *Purusha* or Soul is the Supreme Soul and the individual souls (*Jivatmas*) are its reflections in the bodies of living beings. That supreme soul is inactive and passive though illuminative, but its reflection in us appears to be active on

account of its being enshrined in the body and being subject to *gunas*.

We have now come to the reasons for the discourse given by Krishna to Arjuna in Chapter II, that he should not delude himself into the belief that it is he who kills because his real self which is immortal, never kills nor is ever killed. The real 'I' is different from the bodily self consisting of the senses, mind and intellect. That 'I' is not responsible for the actions of the bodily self which wrongly identifies with it, but it is really the forces of *Prakriti* in the body which impel it to actions. But then a further question naturally arises. Does it mean that man is not responsible for his actions and that the responsibility is fixed only on the forces of nature working in his body? In other words, is man only an automaton of nature and are his actions so determined without any freedom of will on his part that he has to submit himself entirely to what he cannot control? If so, can he be praised for his good conduct and blamed for his bad conduct?

One of the difficulties which we have to face in understanding the Gita is that it does not contain any step by step reasoning, but we have to gather its views from scattered passages. This point about determinism is dealt with in the Gita at various places. In fact, Arjuna himself asks the question: Impelled by what, does man commit sin, though against his wishes, constrained as it were by forces? (III 36). Krishna then narrates these forces and propounds the theory of *Karma* according to which a man can, by freedom

of his will, fight against these forces, raise his lower self by means of his higher self and thus determine his own future. The inactivity and passivity of the soul does not affect the discriminative as well as determinative faculty (*Sankalpa*) of reason which has got to decide what to do and what not to do. Although that faculty belongs to the field of *Prakriti* or nature in us, it is not a blind faculty which acts mechanically but has essentially a selective power to choose any particular course from various courses open to it. Being a part of *Prakriti*, the faculty of will is determined by its laws and has to work within the field of *Prakriti*, but inside the circle which surrounds that field, the will is free to determine its course of action either upwards or downwards amidst the conflicting forces of the lower and higher *Prakriti*. This freedom of the will is well expressed in VI 5, 6 as a conquest of our self by our own self. The same idea of the soul being not affected by actions is expressed in different words in V 14, 15 where it is stated that God, i.e. the Cosmic Soul does not create actions of their agency for men nor does He himself join actions with their fruits or rewards; that is done by the laws of nature; nor does he take on the sin or good merit of any because our knowledge is covered with ignorance. A clear distinction is drawn here between the nature of the higher and lower self. The higher self, i.e. God in us, does not interfere with nor is he affected by our actions which are governed by the laws of nature created by Him. The merit or demerit of our actions belongs to us and

not to Him. This is a combination of the doctrines of the inactivity of the soul with that of a self-determined will. It lies at the basis of the theory of *Karma* or moral Causation which we will discuss when we come to the Ethics of the Gita.

We have seen in the chapter on the Psychology of the Gita that the main difference between the Indian and the Western view is that according to the former, mind as well as reason are organs of the body and not functions of the soul. They belong to the subtle plane of the body. On the Metaphysical side, according to the Indian Vedantic view, there is only one soul in the Universe whom we call God and bodily souls partake of his nature or rather they are portions of Him manifested in the bodies of beings and ultimately merging in Him after births and rebirths. It follows that according to this doctrine, man is not only made in God's image but is essentially an *amasha* or portion of him so far as his soul is concerned and an animal so far as his organs are concerned. By knowledge, mental discipline or *Yoga*, meditation and good actions, he can realise the divine element in his mind and obtain his salvation and release from successive rebirths. This is a unique doctrine differing from all other metaphysical theories of soul. According to the Christian doctrine, man is a sinful creature and cannot obtain his salvation except by prayers and especially by Divine Grace. Moral virtues are a means to obtain salvation according to both but the Indian Philosophy regards them as constituents of good *Karma* which are instru-

mental in reducing the cycle of births and rebirths and the Divine Grace consists in the inspiration received by the mind to rise higher and higher, in the plane of self-realisation. According to the Christian doctrine, there are no births and rebirths and the salvation of the souls of dead bodies is to be determined on the Judgment Day when they will be given due reward or punishment according to their deserts.

Buddhism denies altogether the existence of *Atman* in the individual as well as in the cosmos, as that word is understood by Vedanta. According to it, the suffering of man is due to his belief in *Atman* or 'I' which causes bondage. There is therefore no question of the identity of the individual with the cosmic soul and release consists in the annihilation of the individual life which is like the extinction of a burning lamp on the exhaustion of the oil and wick. Nevertheless, Buddhism does believe in the doctrine of *Karma* and rebirths, not on the basis of the ultimate merger of the individual with the cosmic soul but only on the natural plane as it is the nature or *Svabhava* of a being to be reborn.

The belief in the identity of the human and the cosmic soul is thus a peculiar doctrine of the Vedanta Philosophy which distinguishes it from all other systems. It has affected all branches of Hindu Culture and its later development in the pure non-dualistic schools of Shankaracharya and modified non-dualistic school of Ramanujacharya and other schools of Vedanta have been a landmark in Indian

Philosophy to this day. It succeeded in surviving Buddhism in India and has stood the test of time. As we shall see later on, if there is any ancient philosophical system the tenets of which approximate to the latest researches of modern science, it is the Indian Vedanta School of the ultimate reality of Spirit. At the same time, if there is any abstruse philosophy which has been misunderstood the most, it is the Vedanta system. It is said that the Vedanta doctrine reduces the world to an illusion and thus encourages a pessimistic view of life. If the world is unreal and the real Absolute *Brahman* cannot be known, what remains, it is asked, for a man to know and to do? If everything which is knowable is illusory and is the product of *Maya*, what is the value of knowledge at all? And if the real is unknowable, what is the place of philosophy and religion in life? If man as a finite creature is unreal, how can he possess the essence of God in him? These are all legitimate questions, if according to Vedanta, the phenomenal world is entirely illusory. In fact, the Vedanta theory has been vehemently attacked on these grounds and it is said no rational answer to this criticism has been furnished. However, if we examine the theory closely, it will be seen that this criticism arises partly because of the misunderstanding of the real doctrine and partly by the extreme form in which it is advanced by those who profess to believe in it.

The word *Maya* is as old as Rig Veda where it is stated "Indra is perceived as manifold by *Maya*"

(R.V. VI 47, 18). This observation is quoted in the Brihadaranyakopaniṣad: "He transforms Himself in accordance with each form. That form of His was for the sake of making Him known. Indra on account of *Maya* is perceived as manifold. For to him are yoked hundreds of organs." (Br. II 15, 18). So also in Svetasvatara Upaniṣad, the word *Maya* occurs in various places. At one place, it is said "Know thou that Nature is *Maya* and that the Great God is the Lord of *Maya*. The whole world is filled with beings who form his parts." (IV 10). In all these quotations from Rig Veda downwards, the word *Maya* is not used in the sense of illusion or unreality. It is used in the sense of transformation of *Brahman* in different forms in *Prakṛiti* or Cosmos by His own inscrutable power or energy. A detailed definition of *Maya* is given in the Sarvopaniṣad as follows:— "That which is beginningless, fruitless, open to both proof and disproof, neither real nor unreal,—unreal—non-existent, when, because of the immutability of its own substratum, the cause of change is ascertained; existent—when it is not so ascertained—thus that which is undefinable is called *Maya*." (IV). Elsewhere in the Upaniṣads it is called *Anirvachaniya* that is indescribable. The Br. Upaniṣad has called *Brahman* at one place "The Reality of realities or the Truth of truths" (II 1, 20) meaning thereby that the changing cosmic world is real and the *Brahman* which permeates it is the Absolute Reality behind the relative Reality of the cosmic world. The Gita has adopted this Upaniṣadic view. It has used

the word *Maya* not in the sense of illusion or unreality but as the inscrutable Divine Energy or hidden power by which the *Brahman* transforms a part of itself into the cosmic world. It says "The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings causing all beings, by his *Maya*, to revolve as if mounted on a machine." (XVIII 61). "Though I am unborn, of changeless nature and Lord of beings, yet subjugating my *Prakriti*, I come into being by my own *Maya*" (IV 6). "Verily this divine *Maya* of mine, constituted of the *gunas*, is difficult to cross over; those who devote themselves to Me alone, cross over this *Maya*" (VII 14). "Veiled by *Yoga-Maya* (i.e. union of the three *gunas*), I am not manifest to all. This deluded world knows me not, the unborn, the immutable." (VII 25). Thus according to the Gita *Maya* is real as well as unreal from two different points of view. In relation to the Absolute of which it is a cosmic transformation, it is unreal in the sense that all such manifestations have a transitory existence and reality can be said to belong only to that which exists apart from notions of time and space, viz. the Absolute. But in relation to all other transitory beings, which exist in the cosmos, it is real because both have attributes, names and forms and are existing in the world of time and space. If a man can know or realise the Absolute in himself, he can call the cosmic world illusory because to him who has realised the Absolute, all things in the changing world must appear unreal. But for all men who have not known and cannot know or realise the Absolute, the things of

the world are as real as He himself because he does not know the real nature of the Absolute in relation to which alone the world can be said to be unreal. If a man sees a piece of rope and mistakes it for a snake, it is an illusion because he is misled by the common form of both and deludes himself in thinking that he has seen a snake when he has really seen a rope. But a man who has never seen or imagined a snake will not fall under the illusion because he cannot see the rope in relation to the snake about which he knows nothing. Except, therefore, to a few *yogis* who might realise in themselves the nature of the imperceptible Absolute, we cannot say that all things are unreal or illusory to us. Two finite objects are such in relation to the infinite, but between themselves, they are real as finite objects. Sea water assumes the form of waves and foam for a time and the waves lose their entity as such by losing their forms, but for the time being their different forms are real in relation to each other. Thus the existence and non-existence of finite and transitory bodies depend on their relation with the infinite. This is the meaning of the passage from the Sarvopanishad that *Maya* is "non-existent when, because of the immutability of its own substratum, the cause of change is ascertained, and existent, when it is not so ascertained."

It is only when we come to the Mandukyakarika of Gaudpada, the preceptor of Shankaracharya, that we find the doctrine of *Maya* stated in terms which are capable of regarding it as an illusion and unreality. Even Shankaracharya who has stretched the doctrine

of non-duality of the Absolute to the utmost is constrained to admit the Vyavaharika, i.e. phenomenal or relative reality of the world. Nimbarka who has propounded the doctrine of *Dvaitadvaitvada* or *Parinama-Vada*, as it is called, had applied the principle of relativity to Philosophy and has admitted the relative reality of the cosmic world by laying down that the universe is a real modification of *Parinama* of *Brahman*. He has thus supported the Upanishadic interpretation of *Maya*. Ramanuja is also a supporter of the relative reality of the world which, according to him, is for us is a real world. The theory of Relativity which, in Indian Philosophy is known as *Sapeksha Vada* or *Syada Vada*, bases knowledge on relative values and not on their absolute values. According to Einstein, it applies to the world of time and space which have no existence apart from the relation of objects to each other. The Gita not only recognises the world as real, as a cosmic manifestation of the *Brahman* but also lays considerable stress on the necessity of doing work and discharging one's duties, instead of regarding the world as an illusion and escaping from it by renunciation. The false notion about the illusory nature of the world and the equally false notion about fatalism have been responsible for the lowering down of the Hindu ideal of life and have done considerable harm by fostering a spirit of inertia and other-worldliness among our people. We have forgotten the pregnant meaning of the great *Mantra* of the Brihadaranyakopanishad; "That (Absolute

Brahman) is infinite, and this (cosmic or manifested *Brahman*) is also infinite. The infinite proceeds from the infinite. Taking the infinitude of the infinite (cosmic world), it remains as the infinite (*Brahman*) alone." (V 1, 1). The meaning of the cryptic language of this *Mantra* is that pure *Brahman* and manifested *Brahman* look like cause and effect but in essence they are one and the same. Parts of manifold *Brahman* look different and real to us but they being changing manifestations of the infinite, proceed from the infinite *Brahman* and also just as that *Brahman* is real or *Purna*, the manifold *Brahman* is also *Purna* because they are two aspects of the same infinite and are not related as cause and effect. It is true that the Upanishads encourage a renunciatory spirit on the ground that knowledge of the soul can be obtained by retiring from the world of actions, but not on the ground that the whole manifold world is an illusion. The Gita corrects even that view and says that not only is the world a reality for us but disinterested action in the worldly life is the key to get happiness and salvation for the whole of mankind. What is illusory is not the world but the false meaning that has been attached to *Maya*. It has led us into a life of inaction and pessimism. It is high time that we should revive the teaching of the Gita and lead an active and energetic life in the present age when such activity is required more than ever before. If our collective *Atman* is to be realised in the present age, it can only be done by improving the world and not by treating it as an illusion. The Upanishads tell

us "Awake! arise! stop not till you reach the goal."

We have now come to the conclusion that if we wish to seek God, we should find Him in His cosmic manifestation and not in His abstract conception. The Gita makes us find it in that form in a sublime manner. We can discover God as the essence of created objects or we can find created objects in God, because, as we have just seen, both are two aspects of the same reality. In Chapter X the Gita makes us see God in all things which we consider the best among others of the same kind and in Chapter XI the Gita describes how Krishna gave divine vision to Arjuna to see all things in God which cannot be seen by our sensuous eyes. This description is the high watermark of lofty and superb imagination by which we can conceive, if not see, God in a gentle, beautiful, sublime as well as awe-inspiring form in the cosmic world. It brings joy as well as terror in our minds and makes us lower our heads in reverence and humility before the all-pervading Almighty and all-illuminating Spirit or Energy before whom we look like worms. In love, we offer our hearts to him, in terror, we seek mercy from him and before the glittering grandeur of his cosmic form, we pray to him to give us a ray of his light to illuminate the depths of our embodied souls. Whenever a created body or being attains its best form of evolution, we say that it has developed its soul or essence and it is therefore nearer to the cosmic soul than others. Whatever therefore is best among others contains the attributes of God in it to a greater degree than others.

“Whatever being there is great, prosperous or powerful, that know thou to be a product of a part of my splendour” (X 41). Thus ends the long description of whatever is most developed among others in the world. Let it not be supposed that this is a description of what is best from the moral standpoint. It is a general description of the element of cosmic power or energy in everything whether good or bad. Otherwise it would not contain such statement as “I am the gambling of the fraudulent, I am the power of the powerful; I am victory, I am effort, I am *Salva* of the *Satvika*.” (X 36). After being told that the cosmic soul is the seed and essence of all beings as their macrocosmic form, Arjuna wants to see the macrocosmic form of that soul in which the whole universe is centred in one body, including the moving and unmoving. We have no eyes to see that form or *Vishvarupa* at one sweep of our vision. We can only see it in parts of the cosmos. Arjuna is therefore given the power to see the whole vision in which he saw in the body of God “the whole universe resting in one with its manifold divisions” (XI 13). Having seen that majestic form, his mind is seized with overpowering awe and terror and he feels by contrast what a humble creature is man in the whole Cosmic Giant. He exclaims: “Having seen thy immeasurable Form with many mouths, eyes, O Mighty-armed! with many arms, thighs and feet, with many stomachs, and fearful with many tusks—the worlds are terrified and so am I. On seeing these touching the sky shining many a colour with mouths

B.G.—6.

wide open with large and fiery eyes, I am terrified at heart and find no courage nor peace." (XI 23, 24). Having seen for the first time the real form of the Almighty, his mind is baffled and he wants to know for what purpose he has taken such a terrible form. He asks "Tell me who Thou art, fierce in form, Salutation to Thee, O Deva Supreme; have mercy. I desire to know Thee, O primeval One. I know not indeed Thy purpose" (XI 31). He gets the answer; "I am the Mighty world-destroying Time here made manifest for the purpose of enfolding the World" (XI 32). And then Krishna reveals the secret of his working in Nature. It is He who is the real force or power behind everything. It is He who creates, preserves as well as destroys and man is only an instrument in His hands. He therefore asks Arjuna to be an instrument for doing that which He has already decided. Krishna says "Even without thee, none of the warriors arrayed in the hostile armies shall live. Therefore do thou arise and acquire fame. Conquer the enemies, and enjoy the unrivalled domain. Verily by Myself have they been already slain; be thou merely an apparent cause." (XI 32, 33). Arjuna now grasps the object of Krishna's giving him the divine vision. It was for giving him an answer to the question which he had asked in Chapter II "Why should I kill?" Arjuna realises that he is only an instrument in the hands of God to do that which He has willed and decided to get executed through him and he asks for Krishna's

forgiveness for not understanding his true nature and purpose till then.

This superb and sublime discourse between Krishna and Arjuna has been made the occasion by the author of the Gita to give a vivid imaginary picture of the Supreme Person or *Purushottama* working in and by means of the embodied souls. It shows the organic relation between the cosmic and the individual souls. Both are portions of the Supreme Soul and have to work under the laws by which the Universe is governed. When an individual does an act, he thinks that he is the sole author of the act and does as he wishes to do. But his wish is determined by himself as an instrument of the Supreme Being because it is governed by the inscrutable laws of God which rule the whole created world. Does this mean that man has no responsibility for his actions? In order to answer that question, it is necessary to examine in what sense the Gita says that man is an instrument of God in (XI 13). We have seen before, that according to the Gita, "even a wise man acts in accordance with his own nature, *being follow nature*; what can restraint do." (III 33). The meaning of this passage is that *Prakriti* i.e. the laws of nature by which man is governed and the nature of his individual soul with which he is born on account of his past *Karma* determine his actions and this nature is too strong for him with the result that even his faculty of determination is affected by it. That is what is meant when it is stated later on: "If filled with self-conceit thou thinkest 'I will not fight' vain is this thy resolve;

thy *Prakriti* will constrain thee. Fettered by thy own *Karma*, born of thy nature, what thou from delusion desirest not to do, thou shalt have to do in spite of thyself." (XVIII 59, 60). Thus man is an instrument of God not in the sense that in whatever he does, he acts under the arbitrary direction of God for a particular action but that he is generally under the sway of *Prakriti* which is a creation of God and in obeying the laws of *Prakriti*, he is an instrument by which these laws manifest themselves in the world. But the actions which are governed by natural laws may be voluntary as well as involuntary. It does not mean that in doing a particular act, he is an automaton and has not to exercise his will. Within the four walls of *Prakriti* in which his soul is, as it were, imprisoned, he is free to act as he wills. Sometimes he does not wish to do an act and still when the will is overpowered by the inherent forces of his own mind, he has to do it. Some times he wishes to do an act but the forces of his mind are so weak that he cannot do it. It is his duty to so increase or decrease the intensity of these forces that his actions are in conformity with the laws of God. If a man commits murder of an innocent person, his defence that he did it only as an instrument of God and is not therefore responsible for his act will not avail him, because the authorities can say that they are also instruments of God in acting according to the law for punishing murder and in acquiring power to enforce these laws. If it is a part of *Prakriti* i.e. law of nature, that men should live in a well-ordered

society, it is also a part of *Prakriti* that whoever does anything which is against the welfare of society should suffer for it. In such a case, all are instruments of God—those who make laws as well as those who break them. The man who has to die for committing a murder also dies as an instrument of God for preservation of society. Thus there is the scope for the exercise of will and choice even when acting as an instrument of God. In other words, man has freedom of will to do as he wishes but the will is under the sway of natural forces which he has got to obey and thus become an instrument of God by surrendering his will to Him. If he suffers in any way by doing so, it is an essential penalty of his earthly life and is the result of his own past *Karma*. That is the essence of what the Gita means by 'instrument of God' and that takes us to the doctrine of *Karmavada* or the Ethics of the Gita.

28-5-52

CHAPTER VII ETHICS OF THE GITA

LIKE its psychology, the ethics of the Gita is inseparably connected with its metaphysics. All the three revolve round the nature of the human soul. Its psychology is based on the principle that the soul is qualitatively different from and higher than the organs, including mind and reason; its metaphysics rests on the principle that the embodied soul is in essence a portion of the universal soul, which manifests itself in different names and forms while its ethics has for its principle that human conduct, *Karma*, determines the form of the material covering the subtle body and the *summum bonum* of life is to reverse the process by releasing the soul from its covering by gradual stages, through successive births and rebirths and finally get *Mukti*, that is, emancipation by its absorption in the universal soul. The central idea is that every thought or deed produces an effect on the subtle matter which surrounds the soul either by making it more or less subtle; this effect is accumulated on the soul when it leaves the body at the time of death with this covering and is re-born in another body in the same or a lower species according to the nature of the covering, depending on the grossness or otherwise of the accumulated *Karma*. It can, by reducing that grossness, succeed in so purifying itself from its material covering that it becomes capable of being reabsorbed into the original source from which it had taken a bodily form and thus free itself from the cycle of earthly

existence. On this theory, the conduct of a man is judged as good or bad, not on the material or social benefits it may produce, but on whether it purifies or degrades the soul. Thus the theory of *Karma* is based on the law of Moral Causation which is inexorable and from which no one can escape. Its working is not quickly perceptible as the sphere of its action is so subtle and complex that it takes a long time to make its effects perceptible. A human being is a limb of the social organism and as every organism has a soul, the social organism has also its soul which is affected by the *Karma* or the actions of the beings who form part of the Society. The size of the Society at a particular time depends on the number of persons who come into mutual relation with each other. The collective soul is also called the soul of the people or the Spirit of the nation, but when nations themselves are seen as organs of a still higher organism, viz., Humanity, the social soul is seen in its real form as the soul of Humanity and the *Karma* of the individual soul and the collective soul of humanity affect each other. Such being the case, the unit in the scheme of Nature is not the individual soul but the collective soul of mankind and the operation of the laws of such collective *Karma* becomes still more complex and take a long time to produce perceptible effects. Although the collective *Karma* appears in the background of the theory of *Karmavada*, it is a logical result of the *Law of Karma* and should be regarded as an integral part of the theory.

This in substance is the general outline of the doctrine of *Karma*, the details of which have been considerably developed later on, partly on popular beliefs. The older Vedas do not propound it in any definite form but they do speak of *Rita*, that is, an all-pervading Law of which Varuna was the presiding deity. *Rita* also meant Truth, thus identifying truth as that which is according to the cosmic law and *Anrita*, that is, untruth, as that which is against the law. The laws which prevail in the physical as well as mental creation proceed from the same source, although they have different aspects. Every effect has a cause which in turn is an effect of another cause in the chain of causation. Thus an idea or action is caused by a desire or an activity of mind and it in turn produces an effect on the mind. As mind is material, its products have also a material existence and produce their effect on the inner body. These effects are, as it were, so stamped on the subtle covering of the soul, that they become part of it when it leaves the body.

One of the earliest passages in the Upanishads about the *Karma* theory is to be found in the Br. Upanishad in the form of a dialogue between Yajnavalkya and Artabhaga. The latter asks: "Yajnavalkya! when the vocal organ of a man who dies is merged in fire, the nose in the air, the eye in the sun, the mind in the moon, the ear in the quarters, the body in the earth, the ether of the heart in the external ether, the hair of the body in the herbs, that on the head in the trees and the blood and the

seed are deposited in water, where is then the man?" Yajnavalkya replies, "Give me your hand, dear Artabhaga! We will decide this between ourselves; we cannot do it in the crowd." They then went out and talked it over. "What they mentioned there was only *Karma* and what they praised there was only *Karma*. One indeed becomes good through good *Karma* and evil through evil *Karma*" (III 2-13). This is the Upanishadic way of impressing the idea that the theory of *Karma* is a mysterious belief which cannot be argued among people who cannot easily follow it, but is to be realised in a quiet atmosphere.

The further development of this doctrine is to be found in the various Upanishads, especially in Chhandogyopanishad and it has been summed up in Badarayana's Brahma Sutras. As is natural in such an abstruse topic, there are different views about the details of the doctrine, not only between the three religious systems of India which accept this doctrine, but even amongst the Sankhya and the Vedanta systems of Hindu Philosophy itself. It is not our purpose to discuss all these, as we are concerned with the view adopted in the Gita which is mainly based on the Vedanta of the Upanishads. As we have seen above, the embodied soul has a gross as well as a subtle body. This consists mainly of five layers or *Kosha*. The first consists of *Annamaya Kosha* made of the gross matter of the body which is formed from the food which we eat; the second is *Pranamaya Kosha* which is made of breath inside the body which

is less gross than the outer body. Then comes *Manomaya Kosha* or mind which is even less gross than breath. Next comes the *Gnanamaya Kosha* or Reason which is subtler than mind. Last comes the *Anandmaya Kosha* or Bliss which is the most subtle form of body, and beyond and outside all these coverings is the soul. The *Karma* affects all coverings but after death the gross body and life are detached from the others and the soul departs with the subtle coverings. Its future journey depends on the nature of these coverings. There are three paths by which the soul travels after death. If it is absolutely pure and has realised the knowledge of the Absolute, it goes by the path of what is called *Devayana* or the way of gods through the fire in which the body is burnt and attains release without being reborn. The other path is called *Pitriyana* or the way of fore-fathers. People who have performed good actions from the religious or moral standpoint go along the way from the smoke of the fire through intermediaries to heaven but after the merit of their good work is exhausted, they have to return to this world and be born again in the human species to work out their *Karma* for their unmeritorious actions. The third path is of people of sinful actions. They are immediately reborn in this world in a lower species, viz., the lower animals.

The *Karma* of those persons who have to be reborn here sooner or later has to be worked out in a twofold manner. The total past *Karma* of every

person is called his accumulated or *Sanchita Karma* and he has to take rebirths for working out portions of that accumulated *Karma*. This portion of *Karma* then being worked out in a particular re-birth is called commenced or *Prarabdha*. If during any re-birth he obtains supreme knowledge and according to the Gita also performs all his actions disinterestedly and unattachedly, he ceases to be affected by *Sanchita Karma* in future, but he has got to finish the *Prarabdha Karma* the course of which has already begun to run. If, after that period is over, all his past *Karmas* have been wiped out by highest knowledge or good actions or by supreme devotion, he ceases to be reborn and obtains as good salvation as a great Yogi.

Having seen the general outline of the twin doctrines of *Karma* and re-birth, let us now return to what the Gita has to say about it. The Gita generally adopts the Sankhya view of *Karma* as modified by its metaphysical doctrine of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* being both two different aspects of the Absolute. Its definition of *Karma* taken in its widest meaning proceeds from this combination of the two schools of Sankhya and Vedanta. "*Brahman* is the indestructible and supreme (element); its essential nature is the Self: *Karma* is the name given to the creative force which brings beings into existence". (VIII 3). This is the widest definition of *Karma* as it includes not merely the *Karma* of individual souls or the *Karma* of Humanity but also that of the cosmic soul. The whole created world

is the *Karma* of the Absolute but in the narrower sense of the word, *Karma* means action done by the individual soul on account of its contact with *Prakriti* and its *gunas*. Wherever there is *Prakriti* or Nature, there is *Karma*. "Verily none can rest for even an instant without performing action; for all are made to act helplessly indeed by the *gunas* born of *Prakriti*." (III 5). "*Purusha* seated in *Prakriti* experiences the *gunas* born of *Prakriti*; the reason of his birth in good and evil wombs is his attachment to the *gunas*". (XIII 21). The tendency of all *Karma* is to bind a man to nature so that he becomes more and more attached to it. At the same time, no one can avoid doing *Karma*. "By non-performance of work none reaches worklessness; by merely giving up action, no one attains to perfection". (III 4). It is, therefore, necessary to work with a controlled mind and in an unattached manner (III 7). "Actions cannot be entirely relinquished by an embodied being, but he who relinquishes the fruit of action is called a relinquisher". (XVIII 11). Thus the real art consists in doing actions in such a manner that they would not bind a man, and that means in doing work for its own sake as a duty and not for its fruits, because getting the desired fruit of action depends on a number of forces which are beyond our control. An action is to be judged as good, not because of its outward results, but because of its inherent quality to purify the mind. It is for that reason that a man's obligation is to do his duty without any right to get its fruit. (II 47).

He must realise that he should not depend even on God to give him the desired fruits because actions are governed by the laws of God and not by his arbitrary will. "God does not create actions or their instruments for men. Nor does he bring about the union of actions with their fruits. It is only nature that prevails. Nor does God take away the merit or demerit of any one". (V 14, 15). "I am the same to all beings; to me there is none hateful or dear". (IX 29). This is the *Rita* or Law which is the foundation of the doctrine of *Karma*. It is therefore necessary to know how the law works.

As the soul is immortal, life is one continuous existence. Death is not the end of the soul's life, but only a stage in its career for a change of bodies. "Just as a man casts off worn out clothes and puts on others which are new, so the embodied casts off worn out bodies and enters into others which are new." (II 22). It follows as a natural corollary of the continuity of the individual soul that its rebirth is as certain as its death. (II 27). Krishna tells Arjuna: "It is not that I have never existed, not thou nor these things, nor is it that we shall cease to exist in the future. As are childhood, youth and old age of this body to the embodied soul, so also is the attaining of another body". (II 12, 13). But the nature of the re-birth depends on the quality of *Karma* which it has done in its past life. It is *Satvika* if it is done without love or hatred and without any desire of its fruits and free from attachment. It is *Rajasika* if it is actuated by desires

or self-conceit and with much effort and it is *Tamasika* if it is done through delusion without regard to the consequences and without regard to one's human capacity. (XVIII 23, 24, 25). The bonds of *Karma* can be broken only if one acquires as well as realises in himself the supreme knowledge of the identity of his soul with the Absolute, (IV 37), or if by intense devotion one merges himself in the divine will (XI 55) and (XII 6), or by the discharge of one's duties in an unattached and disinterested state of mind (IV 41). All the three are equally efficacious, although their paths are different. "Fire, flame, day-time, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern passage of the sun—taking this path (*Devayana*) the knowers of *Brahman* go to *Brahman*". (VIII 24). "Smoke, night time, the dark fortnight, the six months of the southern passage of the sun—taking this path (*Pitriyana*), the *Yogi* attains the lunar light, returns (to this world)". (VIII 25). "These malicious and cruel evil doers, most degraded of men, I haul perpetually into the wombs of *Asuras* only in these worlds. Obtaining the *Asurik* womb and the deluded birth after birth, not attaining to me, they thus fall into a still lower condition. Triple is the gate of Hell, destructive of the self-lust, anger and greed; therefore, one should forsake these three" (XVI 21, 22, 23). Then again some people do their *Karma* in the form of religious observances such as sacrifices of material articles for the purpose of going to heaven and get material happiness. "Such people

who are full of desires and look upon heaven as their highest goal and who, taking pleasure in the panegyric words of the Vedas, declare that there is nothing else, and who perform specific rites as the means to pleasure and power are subject to rebirth as a result of their mind being actuated by desires." (II 42-43). "Such persons having enjoyed the vast *Svarga*-world enter the moral world on the exhaustion of their merits; thus abiding by the injunctions of the three (Vedas) desiring pleasures, they (constantly) come and go". (IX 21). These sarcastic remarks against the priestly and other classes of people who mechanically practise religious observances only for the sake of obtaining happiness and heavenly enjoyment, point to the low level to which people had fallen after the spirit lying behind the Vedic sacrifices had disappeared and religion had become too formal. As has been stated above, the Upanishads as well as the Buddhist religion were a strong re-action amounting to a revolt against the deterioration which had crept inside the Hindu society and one of the main objects of the Gita was to divert men's minds from the barren and downward path of dogmatic formalities of religion to the progressive path of inner life in which religion is not to be merely practised but lived for the uplift of the soul. Both the Upanishads and the Gita retain the popular notions of Heaven and Hell which are indeed common to almost all the religious systems of the world, but they give a new interpretation to them by saying that although they exist, they are

only temporary abodes from which one had got to return to this world to work out his remaining accumulated *Karma* after he has enjoyed the reward of his good actions. This is meant only as a popular concession and an incentive to people for doing their duties with a disinterested state of mind. The Gita lays constant stress on the necessity of giving up all notions of enjoyment here or in heaven as a reward of actions, and of setting up the goal of the purification of the soul so as to make it fit for self-realisation. "Thus shalt thou be freed from the bondage of actions, bearing good and evil results; with the heart steadfast in the *Yoga* of renunciation, and liberated, thou shalt come into Me". "Reaching the highest perfection, and having attained Me, the great-souled ones are no more subject to rebirth, which is the home of pain and ephemeral". "All the worlds including the realm of *Brahman* are subject to return, but after attaining Me, there is no re-birth". (VIII 15-16). These passages from the Gita will show that it has mainly accepted the *Karma* doctrine from the Upanishads, but with one important difference. The goal of liberation according to Upanishads is *Brahman*, the Absolute in which the liberated souls merge after the *Karma* is exhausted. According to the Gita, the goal is *Ishvara* the cosmic *Purusha* or a Personal God, not the abstract Absolute. The merger therefore is not in the abstract plane but in the realisation of God in the living man. Although the Upanishadic doctrine is mentioned in VIII 24, 25, the Gita adopts the view consistently

with the metaphysical doctrine, that by devotion a man enters into the Godly state. "By devotion he knows Me in reality, what and who I am; then having known Me in reality, he forthwith enters into Me. Even by doing all actions always, taking refuge in Me—by My Grace, he attains to the eternal, Immutable State". (XVIII, 55, 56). And the climax of the whole teaching of the Gita comes when Krishna says "Occupy thy mind with Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me; bow down to Me; Thou shalt reach Myself; truly do I promise unto thee (for) thou art dear to Me. Relinquishing all *Dharmas*, take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not". (XVIII 65, 66). This is the main difference between the Upanishadic teaching and the Bhagavat doctrine which the Gita preaches. For practical purposes it does not make much difference except that the Upanishads lay almost exclusive stress on knowledge, while the Gita emphasises the Yoga of all the three—Knowledge, Devotion and Duty. The Upanishads lay down a distant goal for liberation while the Gita promises one within the reach of all human beings; the essentials of the *Karma* and re-birth doctrine, however, remain the same in both.

I have dealt at some length on the *Karmavada* doctrine not merely because it is the most important and unique belief common to all the three great religions which arose in India, but also because it requires to be understood carefully as it is liable to be misunderstood and in fact it has been misunderstood by persons who profess to follow that belief.

B.G.—7.

In the first place, it is necessary to emphasise that this doctrine is not a theory which can be proved or demonstrated like other theories about life. What really happens to the soul after it leaves the body is a matter of speculation and imagination for our limited intellect. Nor can we say with certainty through what stages it passes before it is reborn and how it selects a new body. Even among the propounders of this doctrine, there is naturally no unanimity on these and other points. But its value lies in offering an explanation of the inequalities of men from their very birth and a number of discrepancies which cannot be otherwise explained by our present knowledge. It is really a *hypothesis* which has given satisfaction to the followers of these three religions though it may not be said to be a complete solution of the question of life after death. There is, however, no reason to discard it as a hypothesis if we find that it is not only indirectly supported by probabilities but that it supplies a powerful impetus for leading a pure and virtuous life. If we believe that man has got a subtle as well as gross body—and modern science is now leaning towards that belief—it is not at all improbable that the subtle body survives the death of the gross body. If the soul is immortal, and here again eminent modern scientists are now accepting not only the existence but also the immortality of the soul, it must go somewhere after it leaves the gross body. We must either believe that all the souls, after leaving the bodies, remain in a dormant state for a long and

indefinite period and then they are resurrected or we must believe in the law of conservation in nature that nothing remains static and changes of form and motions are eternally taking place in nature. If bodies die and new bodies come into existence, either the souls of dead bodies remain static and new souls are created in the new bodies or the souls of dead bodies enter the new bodies. Then again the inequalities of birth of children of the same parents is either due to pure accident or to a cause inherent in the nature of the soul. Added to this, a number of authenticated instances are given in which young persons, even infants have remembered their past consciousness before their births. Above all, if there is the law of causation in nature, it is not irrational to believe that the law operates as much in invisible nature as it does in the visible and produces effects, the causes of which do exist but are unperceivable by us. If so, what we call moral causation is really a part of natural causation in the cosmic world. A belief in the continuity of life in different garbs is less irrational than a belief in a haphazard and total annihilation of life forces and the creation of a totally new life force in individual bodies. It is true we cannot give a convincing account of all the links in the chain of life and we might have to fill the gaps by imagination based on probabilities but that need not shake the foundation of the hypothesis if there is none better, or more satisfactory to take its place. On the other hand, if it gives solace to our minds and inspires us with

a faith in leading our lives according to the accepted moral canons of all religious faiths, there is no reason why we should not keep the doctrine of *Karma* in the background of our life as a *hypothesis*, even though it is not demonstrable by direct evidence.

Unfortunately, the implications of the *Karma* doctrines are not clearly understood. People are perplexed when a good man is suffering and a wicked man is prospering in the world, and very often people ask whether there is justice in this world when men are not getting their deserts according to their *Karma*. If a saintly man is killed and a wicked man survives in a railway accident, different persons will react differently to the same incident. One man might explain that there is no God in this world, another might say that the good man was destined to die and therefore he thought of going by the train to which the accident was to take place. If the good man had survived, the same man would shift his ground and say that he was destined to live and therefore even though he thought of going by that train, no harm happened to him. A third man might say that good men are required by God and therefore, he was taken away and the bad men remained behind. A fourth man might say that the good man must have committed some sin in his past life and therefore he had to die, and conversely the bad man might have committed some good *Karma* in his past life and therefore he was saved. A fifth man would say that it was a pure accident caused by the fault of some railway man and the *Karma* of the passengers had

nothing to do with the death or survival of some of the passengers, as it was entirely due to natural causes. Leaving aside the case of fate or destiny for the moment, the assumption of most of these persons is that a good man must live and prosper and a bad man must die or suffer. But is there any such relation of cause and effect between them in the scheme of Nature? Goodness of mind has a spiritual or if you like, a natural value while prosperity and happiness has a human value. The quality of goodness depends on the state of mind or soul and that quality does not necessarily possess the capacity to make a man rich. A bad man may be a shrewd businessman notwithstanding his low moral qualities and may earn a lot which might make him a still worse man. The fallacy consists in thinking that the world is created for making a good man happy and a bad man miserable. It is we who attach happiness with prosperity and unhappiness with poverty. In God's nature, these two things have no causal relation. Very often we blame God when the blame is really ours, because we delude ourselves into the belief that God has created this world for man's happiness. Man is comparatively a recent arrival on this earth and it is only his pride that makes him believe that God has to look after his happiness. Man is as much a part of *Prakriti* or nature of God as the lower animals and all are equally governed by His laws except for the fact that man is higher in the scale of evolution of the soul and has self-conscious reason in him. To suffer evil is

a part of his lot as man, even though he may be good and in the world as it is constituted today, a good man has to suffer more than a bad man. Man is equally bound by the laws of nature which act independently of his wish and that is exactly the reason why the Gita repeatedly says that man's duty is to do good work and not to expect its fruits because the goodness of his work has nothing to do with the enjoyment of the fruits in the scheme of Nature. A man's *Karma* affects his mind and his embodied soul and not the forces which might make him rich or poor. Good and evil are man's creations. In God's world, that only is good which is true, i.e. conforms to the laws of nature and that only is bad which is false, i.e. against these laws. That is the double meaning of *Rita* and *Anrita*, as we have seen above. So also there is one word for true as well as good, viz: *Sat*, and *Asat* for false as well as bad.

Apart from the general scheme of nature, there is another reason why a good man has to suffer without any fault of his. We have seen above that besides individual *Karma* there is the collective *Karma* of people having intercourse among themselves. The relation of an individual with society is an organic one and every organism has a soul. Society whether big or small has a social soul or spirit as we call it and the *Karma* of each individual in relation to his fellow beings goes to contribute, for good or bad, to the *Karma* of the social soul. Although this is necessarily implied in our *Karmavada*, it has not received adequate emphasis

to impress it on the minds of the people. Lokmanya Tilak in his *Gita Rahasya* gives due prominence to it. He says "A family, a community, a nation, or even the whole universe cannot escape suffering from the consequences of their actions in the same way as an individual cannot do so; and inasmuch as every human being is born in some family, some community, or some country, it has to some extent to suffer on account of the actions not only of itself but also of the community and society such as the family etc. to which it belongs. But as one has to refer ordinarily to actions of a particular individual, the divisions of *Karma* in the Theory of the Effects of *Karma*, have been made primarily by reference to a single individual" (page 373). Other thinkers like the great Yogi, Arvinda Ghosh, has also referred to this aspect of the doctrine. Even Western thinkers like Shaw Desmond, Paul Brunton and others who believe in the theory of *Karma* also believe in collective *Karma*. Shaw Desmond observes in his "Re-incarnation for Every Man" as follows: "*Karmic Law* has wider implications than the purely individual, but these need not here concern us. For we not only build up our own *Karma*, but in doing so, we are building up the *Karma* of our family, our friends, and our nation, which in turn reacts upon us. As in the law of Return or re-incarnation, the law of *Karma* is all part of a Greater Plan which is working out behind life, not only on this planet but elsewhere There are "race" and "group" *Karmas*, even the *Karma* of our universe, and we

can at will take some of these greater *Karmas* upon us as individuals. They are fascinating and encouraging for the student of the deeper mysteries of existence." (pp. 151-152).

Once we clearly grasp this truth, a number of problems connected with the political and social history of all nations—in the past as well as in the present—are illuminated with new light and history gets a new meaning for us. The philosophy of history leads us to the conclusion that there is God in the history of men as well as in the rest of the world.

The *Karmik* Laws govern the rise and fall of nations, though being of a very complex nature, they take a long time in producing their effects. This truth is a necessary corollary from the Vedanta doctrine that all individual and group souls are modifications of the universal soul which governs the animate as well as the inanimate world. We are getting the benefit as well as the burden of the *Karma* of our forefathers and so shall we transmit both to future generations. Even in our present lives, we are experiencing the effects of the good or bad *Karma* of our fellow beings. As the world is becoming more and more one, we are realising that the unit in the scheme of God is not the individual but the whole of Humanity. Internationalism in every common field of action is now the accepted theory of our political life after long years of strife and bloodshed, born of narrow nationalism. Let us not merely learn but live this great Truth in our

daily lives, but so long as even some do not do so, the rest must suffer and pay the penalty of the unalterable *Karmik Law*. The Hindu Philosophy has given this great truth to the world. A day must come when mankind will realise that it can live on this globe only if it learns to practise this truth in its collective life.

The most serious misconception of the *Karma* theory lies in its being confounded with fatalism. In fact, in the minds of most people, even educated persons, there is a confusion between *Karmavada* and destiny. A wrong understanding of astrology also adds to this confusion. The problem of free will *vs.* determinism also hangs on this issue. If the doctrine of *Karmavada* is rightly understood, it is based on the freedom of will and responsibility for our actions within the domain of the laws of nature with which we are bound. As we have seen above, this doctrine says that we are bound by our past accumulated *Karma* but that we can free ourselves from this bondage by knowledge, devotion or disinterested work. An action binds us when it is done for a motive to enjoy its fruits. If the mind remains detached and disinterested in the consequences when actions are done as a matter of duty, they do not affect our subtle body, but if they are accompanied by desires, i.e. *vasanas*, the grosser elements predominate with the result that our soul is in a degraded state when it leaves the body. The Gita is, therefore, at pains to point out how actions can be done in a manner which would not bind the soul and keep it

in a pure state. This is to be done by the power of determination to lift up our lower self by means of our higher self. The Gita proclaims: "Raise yourself by means of your self; let not your self be dragged down; self is the friend of the self and self is the enemy of the self. The self is the friend of the self for him who has conquered himself by this self; but to the unconquered self, this self is inimical and behaves like a foe." (VI 5, 6). The ancient Westerners also say the same thing. "*Vincit que se vincit*"—"He conquers who conquers himself." This is the essence of the free will which is the same thing as self-determinism. In the technical language of *Karmavada*, we are bound by our accumulated, i.e. *Sanchita Karma*. But how is the *Sanchita Karma* formed? It is the accumulation of our own past actions. But before it begins to accumulate, our actions are done by our will and after they are accumulated, we are bound not by any external agency but by our own previous actions, which mean self-determinism. What binds us is what we ourselves have done in the past and we have the power to shake off the accumulated *Karma* by purifying our mind with knowledge, devotion and disinterested actions. It is quite true that this cannot be done all at once and it is only exceptional persons who can burn their *Karma* by knowledge. Therefore the Gita shows the way of doing it in slow stages, laying stress on the fact that every disinterested action, however small, has its imperceptible effect on the soul. But the point is that it can be done by slow stages and

not that man for ever remains a sinful creature. If the light of the universal soul which shines in the subtle core of the body is not made dim by gross layers caused by excessive desires and passions, it shows the way to extricate oneself from the lower levels of human existence by the strength of determination.

But then, it is said, that we are prompted to do all our actions according to our *Karma* and therefore we are not free to exercise our will. This is really a vicious circle in which we go on moving without any chance of getting out of it. This line of thought is the germ of the theory of pre-destination or fate which has taken a strong hold on the minds of men. Self-determinism and pre-determinism, that is, pre-destination are entirely two different conceptions. *Karmavada* certainly implies self-determinism. But it is opposed to pre-determinism. If it leads to a belief in pre-determinism, it loses all its importance and the whole structure of the Vedanta Philosophy falls to the ground. In fact, it is the reverse of pre-destination although it does mean that a man is bound by the laws of *Prakriti*. But to say that man is bound by the laws of nature is not the same thing as saying that he is so bound that he cannot even get an idea or inspiration to change himself for the better. After giving him a long sermon on the philosophy of life, Krishna winds it up by asking Arjuna to do what he liked and the latter replies that he will act according to his precept. This choice of action does lie in his mind, otherwise Arjuna would

have replied "I have heard you but what can I do? It is my destiny which will lead me to do that which is pre-destined for me." He does not say so but shows his determination to act according to the advice given by Krishna.

We have seen before in what sense, man can be said to be an instrument of God. Although it means that man has to submit to the inscrutable and unalterable laws of God, i.e. Divine Will, it does not mean that whatever he is going to do is so pre-determined for him, that he cannot act otherwise. Pre-determinism or Fatalism is purely a materialistic belief and has no place in any system which believes in the Divine Nature of a man's soul. Even the Sankhya system which believes in *Purusha* and *Prakriti* as two independent elements and does not believe in a Supreme God above them, is not a purely materialistic doctrine as it believes in the power of *Purusha* or the soul. Much less the Vedanta which, although it believes in the Absolute as the only Reality, regards the human soul as its reflection within the domain of *Maya* or *Prakriti*, with all the powers of discrimination and determination. On the other hand, it consistently reminds the individual that "Thou art That and that is Thou" meaning thereby that his goal is self-realisation and there is no self-realisation without self-determination.

Some people will still shake their heads and ask what about the fate or *Daiva* and the influence of stars and planets on us? That is a very common question now-a-days, not merely among the fatalistic

orientals but also among the Westerners who, till recently, ridiculed all people believing in astrological fate, as superstitious heathens. When life becomes frustrated, uncertain or foreboding of dangerous happenings, a wave of fatalism sweeps over the minds of men, however civilized they may call themselves. If you ask different people what they mean by destiny or fate, they will give you different answers. In the Gita the word *Daiva* is used in XVIII 14 where Krishna tells Arjuna the five factors for the accomplishment of all actions according to the Sankhya Doctrine. They are "The seat of action (body), the doer (Self), various kinds of instruments, various kinds of efforts and the fifth *Daiva*." (XVIII 14). The implication is that over and above all the material objects, instruments and means which come into play in the doing of all acts, there is one incalculable element, viz., *Daiva*. No one translator has given the same word for its English equivalent; "Providence, Destiny, Unseen, Presiding Divinity" etc. are the words used in translating *Daiva*. It may be loosely translated as the Lord of Destiny. But what does Destiny mean? Some use it in the sense of conjunction of Known and Unknown causes beyond the control of men. Others mean by it pre-destination, that is, whatever is to happen has been determined by a divinity before it is done and cannot be changed by us. If the first sense of *Daiva* is that in everything that we do, there are certain unknown and incalculable factors which shape the course of events, it is a truth against which the doctrine of *Karmavada* can-

have no quarrel. The Gita accepts that proposition and that is why it says that the consequences or fruits or rewards of our actions are not in our hands. This can be illustrated by giving an example. Suppose we wish to reach a certain place at a particular time and we start accordingly. On the way, our car meets with an accident in which there is so much delay that we cannot reach the place in time and we miss the appointment with the result that we incur some loss thereby. This is *Daiva* in the sense of chance or we may even call it 'fate' in that sense. But people who interpret *Daiva* in the sense of pre-destination will say that before we started we were destined not to reach the place and therefore this accident took place to our car. In other words, the accident appears as an accident to us but some divinity who presides over our destiny had decreed that we should not get the benefit hoped for by keeping the appointment and therefore the accident was, as it were, ordered by the divinity. Whatever effort we would have made to reach the place would have been unsuccessful as we were destined not to reach it. Now suppose, that after the accident took place, a friend's car accidentally came along and we went in the car to keep the appointment in the nick of time, the believer in pre-destination will interpret the two accidents in the sense that we were destined to reach the place in time anyhow, and therefore, although somehow (not by the act of divinity) there was an accident to our car, we got our friend's car by the decree of Fate because we were destined to keep the appoint-

ment. Thus in whatever way the action ends, it is the result of pre-destination. This is a very facile and easy explanation to give because whatever ultimately takes place is ascribed to pre-destination, not before, but after it has taken place. The question is, is there any Divinity which pre-determines every single action that takes place in this world? If so is it God Himself or any other Divinity of parallel authority? The Gita clearly says that it cannot be God because, as we have just seen, God does not interfere with man's actions. He leaves it to *Svabhava*, i.e. the laws of nature (V 14). By preaching *Karmayoga* the Gita raises its powerful voice against pre-destination. To perform actions with a selfless and detached mind is pre-eminently an act of discrimination and determination which cannot be done by a person whose will is determined by external forces. It is true that the Gita uses the word *Daiva* as one of the factors which determines the accomplishment of actions. But as is usual in Hindu Religion, every natural force or agency is deified to show its power and the unknown and unforeseen force which helps or hinders our actions is a force of nature or *Prakriti*. It is only in that sense that the word *Daiva* is used and not in the sense of a force which interferes with the laws of nature or compels a man to do that only which has been ordained beforehand.

Pre-destination is, therefore, a popular belief but it has no foundation in the Hindu Philosophy of life. It cuts at the root of the *Atman* and *Brahman* doctrine and leads man from the path of energetic

action to that of pessimism. The believers in pre-destination realise that this is an extreme doctrine and is contrary to our daily experience. It is, therefore, sought to be modified by saying that *Purushartha* or human effort must always be there, even though our actions are pre-determined. This is quite an inconsistent position and does not bear logical test. Human effort always implies will of a person who chooses to do or not to do a thing. He does not know what is pre-determined for him. What is the value or even need for human effort if it is directed in one way and the pre-destined result is to take place the other way? It is for that reason that people who believe in pre-destination lose their faith in human efforts and allow themselves to be drifted here and there. Different persons react differently to the notions of such fate. Let us illustrate this by an example. Suppose three persons who have undertaken an adventure which would take some months to accomplish it and each one of them is told that he is destined to die within a month. One man might say "I do not care what is going to happen to me. I will go on as if I am not going to die till my work is over." The second man might say "I may be destined to die in a month, but I have begun to do what I think is my duty. And I will go on doing it till I die. It will not be my fault if my work remains unaccomplished." The third man might say with a sigh "I am going to die within a month, what is the use of my doing that which cannot be accomplished by me? I will resign myself to my

fate and wait for my death." This third man typically exemplifies the extreme attitude of fatalism. Once such an attitude takes hold of the mind, it loses all energy and initiative and life becomes a burden instead of a blessing. It is indeed a tragedy that many of us who have inherited the active philosophy of the Gita have gone to the opposite extreme and allowed our *Karmavada* to degenerate into fatalism just as we have allowed *Maya*, the Cosmic Energy of God, to degenerate into illusion and unreality. Krishna gave Arjuna a true picture of what *Karma* means to wean him away from the path of morbid inaction. The same lesson is repeated in our times by Mahatma Gandhi and Lokamanya Tilak, the two great *Karmayogins* of modern India who lived the Gita in their own lives. If we wish to become their true followers, we should try to emulate their example and adopt *Karmavada* as our creed.

But then it will be said, what about the influence of stars and planets on us from our very birth? Does not astrology support the belief in predestination? To my mind, all that astrology can tell us is the general trend of events which are likely to take place and not that each and every action of ours is predestined. Granting that there is a planetary influence on our bodies, gross as well as subtle, from the time of our birth, all that can be claimed is that there is a likelihood or *Yoga* of the conjunction of certain heavenly bodies producing certain effects on human bodies and from this likelihood a prognostication is made of the past and future events in the life of a

B.G.—8.

person. Whenever the past or the future does not tally with the reading of the horoscope, the answer generally given is that the effect of the conjunction of the planets might have been made weaker or stronger by the influence of the horoscope of the other persons of the family because that, too, is said to have its effect on a person's life. Then again the planetary influence is on the body and not on the soul, which controls the will power of a man. Astrology does not claim that each and every action which a man does is pre-ordained. It can only give a reading of the broad events in a man's life which are likely to occur. People are inclined to give greater importance to the events which have occurred as forecasted than to those which have not happened in spite of their forecast. Whatever influence the stars and planets may have on our bodies can be regarded as effects of the laws of nature working through a very subtle medium. It may generally effect our health and even our mental characteristics, but he would be a very bold astrologer who can say with certainty that we cannot think or will otherwise than as directed by the planets. On the contrary, several astrologers admit that human efforts can even change the course of destiny. Astrology cannot forecast what a man will do at a particular moment of time. It does not say that man is not responsible for his actions. If it ever succeeds in proving that, we will have to change all our judicial and penal institutions. Good astrologers are generally modest in their claims. It is only the popular craze for astrology, partly out of

curiosity and partly out of vanity, that has given undue importance to it and advanced extravagant claims for its absolute certainty.

Thus the doctrine of *Karmavada* remains unshaken by the popular belief in pre-destination. It is not that we are absolutely free from any bondage. The Gita preaches that on account of his dual capacity, man is bound as well as free. He is bound by the effects of the past actions of his mind and body according to the inexorable laws of nature, but he is also free inasmuch as he can control and regulate his actions by means of discrimination and determination. He can thus give a turn to the course of his life, in the present as well as in future, for good or for evil. Western psychologists were at one time inclined to view that man's will is absolutely determined by his environment and that there is nothing like free will. But the current is now changed and all leading psychologists are unanimous that the will is free within the circle created by natural environment. A leading psychologist, Mackenzie, says in his 'Manual of Ethics', "Freedom means absence of determination by anything outside the character itself." "There is nothing to prevent a man from doing anything except himself. To be free means that one is determined by nothing but oneself. No form or self can be regarded as ultimately real except rational self. The only true or ultimate freedom will be the freedom that consists in acting from this self as a centre. His true self lies deeper." (p. 78). This is a faint echo of our doctrine of the

(V 24). A happy man is he who does not feel that he is under bondage. For that purpose he has to cultivate a feeling of renunciation of the fruits of action. Then alone will he have immediate peace of mind (XII 12). To practise this is very difficult in the beginning but in the end it makes a man really feel happy. "That which is like poison at first but like nectar at the end, that happiness is declared to be *Satvika*, born of a clear understanding of the self." Material happiness, arising from contact of objects with senses, appears at first like nectar but ends like poison (XVIII 37 and 38). People long for happiness as if it is an end by itself. But it is really a by-product which comes of itself when the mind is calm and controlled. The more we seek it without preparing our mind for it, the more it eludes us and makes us more unhappy. The pursuit of happiness brings a man exhausted and disillusioned into the pit of unhappiness. It comes only when there is no hankering after it and the mind is made fit to receive it. This does not mean the giving up of all material pleasures and comfort. For the worldly man, the Gita advises not to suppress or annihilate desires but their regulation in everything that we do. The most essential requisite for happiness is non-attachment. It is not a negative state of mind but a positive state of control and discrimination. "Devotees in the path of work perform action, only with body, mind, senses and intellect, forsaking attachment for the purification of the heart." (V 11). It is only when a man becomes *sthitapragna* (of steady wisdom) described

in II 55 to 72, that he gets serene happiness. But in order to reach such a state, practice of mental control is absolutely necessary. The Gita does not recommend a complete practice of the *Patanjala Yoga* for all persons. That is difficult and creates trouble for most men, but some *Yogic* exercises and precepts are necessary for all men and these are recommended in VI 10 to 26. The importance of such *Yogic* exercises cannot be over-emphasised. Their value in improving both body and mind is now recognised everywhere—even in England and America—where more and more people are practising them and admit their efficacy. We have a common word—*Yoga*—for all these connected sciences—Physical exercises, Psychology, Ethics, because control of mind is the common factor of all.

Every system of ethics has a catalogue of virtues and vices and most of them are common to all. However different may be the metaphysical background underlying the different religious faiths, whatever may be the nature of the belief in God according to them or even disbelief in the existence of God, a good man is good everywhere and a wicked man is wicked everywhere. The difference is only in emphasis. One religion may put more emphasis on love, another on non-violence and a third on charity and a fourth on truth, a fifth on compassion and a sixth on forgiveness. But all require men to cultivate qualities which go to purify the mind and to serve our fellow-beings. If we read the scriptural books of different religions, we will come across many

ideas about the virtues and vices which are common to all. It is a tragic irony that the clash and bloodshed of religious feuds have been much more due to intolerance in the outward observances of religious rites and ceremonies and in the belief about the externals of religion than on the essentially humanistic virtues of individual and social conduct. The distinction between the higher and lower nature of man corresponding to the divine and devilish qualities is practically the same in all religions. In the Gita they have been dealt with in Chapter XVI. Any one comparing those qualities with discussion on the same topic in other religious books will find a striking similarity between them. The similarity is also in point of their permanent value. The same virtues and vices which were prevalent three thousand years ago are prevalent even now in a more or less accentuated degree.

The word *Yajna*, i.e. sacrifice is the key-word of the Ethics of Gita. Sacrifice is the law of life. On that principle, the Gita constructs a model thesis which would satisfy persons of all stages of mental evolution. The Vedic sacrifices were a common feature in the religious life of the people in the age of the Gita and were popular especially among the orthodox sections for obtaining favours from the Gods. Like the Upanishads, the Gita is sarcastic about mere ritualists who performed them only for getting happiness and whose minds remained ignorant of religious knowledge. The Gita, however, is not opposed to the institution of *Yajna* as being for the benefit of man-

kind (III 14 & IV 23, 24). At the same time it raises the concept of *Yajna* to a higher level and says "Some *Yogis* perform sacrifices to Gods alone while others offer the self as sacrifice by the self in the fire of *Brahman* alone". (IV 25). Thus sacrifice is regarded as an inner offering consisting of all actions of the mind and the functions of the vital energy, as sacrifice in the fire of control for the self kindled by knowledge; offerings of wealth, of self-restraint, and rigid vows, study of scriptures and knowledge and all exercises of mental control (IV 27, 28, 29). Between them, knowledge-sacrifice is superior to sacrifices performed with material objects. Because all action in its entirety attains its consummation in knowledge (IV 33). This sacrifice by means of knowledge is so efficacious that the symbolic sacrificial fire of knowledge reduces all-binding *Karma* to ashes. (IV 37). Thus the Gita asks people not to put too much faith in material sacrifices but turn the spirit of sacrifice inwards and burn all the animal instincts in our mind by means of knowledge of the Self. But this is not the only kind of superior sacrifice. Equally superior is the sacrifice by actions, that is, *Karma Yajnas* in which all desires for the fruits of actions are sacrificed and duty is done for its own sake. "Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest in sacrifice, whatever thou givest away, whatever austerity thou preachest do that as an offering unto Me." (IX 27). This is the culmination of the spirit of sacrifice which is universally true for all men of all times. If sacrifice is the Law

of life, it should be performed without any mental reservation and with complete resignation because every natural law is an expression of the divine will which our individual will is bound to obey.

Once we realise this, we can easily appreciate the social ethics of the Gita. Life is one although its manifestations are innumerable. The individual life has to fit itself into the pattern of life as a whole if it is to retain its individuality. Otherwise it decays and dies. It has, therefore, to sacrifice all its tendencies which are obstructive to its integration with other lives similar to its own. The metaphysical background on which the Gita puts this law is the ultimate identity of the Individual with the Universal soul. "He sees, who sees the Lord Supreme, existing equally in all beings, deathless in the dying." (XIII 27). "The Self is in all beings and all beings are in the Self." "He who sees Me in all beings and sees all beings in Me, he never becomes separated from Me nor do I become separated from him." (VI 30). The social duties of person are therefore a part of his duty to realise himself in his higher self. It is not merely based on identity of interests but on the identity of existence. It is not merely an organic but a super-organic relation in which every limb gets its life force as well as death force from the others. If each limb does not contribute its own share of life force to the others, not only do the others starve and die, but it itself ultimately shares the same fate. That is the subtle relation between individual and society. Just as each limb of the organism has to do

its duty in its own sphere, the individual realises himself by discharging the obligations attached to him according to his station in life. "Devoted each to his own duty, man attains the highest perfection." (XVIII 45). "Better is one's own imperfect *Dharma*, than the *Dharma* of the another well-performed. He who does the duty ordained by his own nature, incurs no evil." (XVIII 48). We are very often dissatisfied with our lot by comparing it with that of others. But we must realise our capacity as well as limitations and not try to imitate others. We must, of course, try to rise higher and higher but we must first discharge the duties nearest to us without envying the lot of others. It is our well-performed duties in our own sphere that should give us contentment, because that contributes to our individual progress as well as social stability. This principle has been applied by the Gita to the four *Varnas* which was the social as well as the professional order of the day, Today, the professional *Varnas* do not exist and they have been replaced by hereditary castes. A *Brahmin* can now join business or military profession, a *Kshatriya* can be a scholar as well as a businessman and a *Vaishya* can be a soldier or a scholar. But the principle is still applicable that whatever may be the caste or profession of a person, he has to discharge his duties to himself as well as to society according to his position in life and if he does so honestly and with a social sense, many of the economic and political evils which we are suffering from would be considerably reduced, and there would be less scope

for socialism and communism. The Gita expresses a socialistic principle in religious phraseology when it says "He who enjoys objects given by Gods without making offering in return to them is, verily, a thief." (III 12). The same idea has been expressed in *Ishavasyopanishad* "There is the dwelling place of God in everything that is moving in this world. Enjoy the world with a sense of selflessness; do not hankar after another man's wealth." In the language of social Ethics, it means that he who enjoys wealth more than necessary for him, is really stealing it because it also belongs to his fellow beings with whose help he has acquired it and it is therefore a trust property with him. As every social organism is a body with a soul, it follows that all black-marketeers, profiteers and other persons doing anti-social activities, whether on a small or big scale, are not merely thieves but guilty of causing grievous hurt as, by their actions, they disfigure and mutilate the collective body of the community in which they live. The socialism of the Gita, however, is not based on class conflicts. Its sanctions are not violent but are based on moral and religious injunctions. There would be no necessity for any such conflict if the matter is approached from the higher standpoint of religion and not of political economy. The unit in nature is the whole humanity and not a particular individual or a nation, however great it may be. The growing concept of one-world and the increasing desire to solve conflicting national problems on international basis, after two exhausting world wars have brought the question in its right

perspective but the basis should not be merely economic considerations nor identity of interests but unity and dignity of human life. That can be achieved if Humanism dwells not merely on the lips of the politicians but fills their hearts as a religious duty. The metaphysical concept of the Gita underlying social ethics may be regarded too high and unapproachable but in the ultimate analysis, it is the only one which is real and lasting because it is based not on opportunism but on deeper naturalism. Within the bodies of all men there is a common soul of Humanity dwelling in all the hearts. When the shouting and tumult of battles is over, however long it may take, it is this latent soul which will assert itself as more powerful than all the weapons of war. The Gita treats Humanity as one and indivisible and that is the principle underlying not only its Ethics, but also its religion. That brings us to the religion of the Gita.

28-5-52

RELIGION OF THE GITA

If humanity is to be treated as one and indivisible and if there is one God in the Universe, it follows as a necessary corollary that there can be only one religion for all—the religion of Humanism. But although God has given us the faculty of reason to realise this, He has also put us in the middle of our evolution and our imperfect reason is therefore under the sway of the forces of our lower nature. Even against our will, these forces very often prove too strong for us. We see the goal before us in the horizon, but we are lost in the woods and cannot find the path which leads us to it. Now and then, the Voice speaks to us through its chosen medium, telling us where the path lies but although we pay lip homage to it, our spirit proves too weak to respond to it. This does not mean that the foundation of religious creeds everywhere must be the same. So long as real knowledge of the ultimate reality of life remains screened from us, there are bound to be differences in our beliefs about God and the way in which He reveals Himself to us. Such differences remain not only among the various religious systems of the world but also in the same system, as we have seen in our own Hindu religion. But behind all these conflicting creeds, there are eternal truths of life which are common to all religions and which must form a common platform for all men to meet together. Historical, geographical, sociological and psychological

differences between men produce different mentalities, traditions, customs and manners among the people of the world. They crystallise into different institutions and dogmas of life but behind all these heterogeneous elements, the forces that govern man's individual and collective life are essentially the same and these forces operate according to the law of nature, that humanity can realise its goal of life if, in spite of the diversity of its component parts, it collectively develops the higher nature of man. This takes us to the inevitable conclusion that whatever may be the personal beliefs of men about the mystery of the Universe, and whatever faith or creed they adopt in professing a particular religion, there is one common religion in which man and man can work together for promoting the common good of humanity. Such service by self-sacrifice is one of the ways of worshipping God because whatever means are adopted to realise one's self in a higher self, takes us nearer to God. The Gita impresses this truth on us clearly and forcibly, when after explaining the whole philosophy of life to Arjuna, Krishna tells him: "Give up all religious systems and take refuge in Me. I will relieve you from all sins. Don't be grieved." (XVIII 66). "Fix thy mind in Me only, place thy intellect in Me. Then thou shalt no doubt live in Me hereafter." (XII 8). Thus does Gita raise its voice against the particularism of religious creeds and preach a lofty universalism which is meant not merely for Hindus but for the entire humanity. In the whole religious literature of the world, there is hardly

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a parallel to this superb teaching in which a religious preceptor asks his co-religionist to renounce his creed and go straight to God. There have been persecutions, wars and massacres for forcing people of other religious beliefs to adopt one's own religion. But here, Krishna asks Arjuna to regard creed as secondary and devotion to God as the primary element of religion. This is also what the mystics of all religions proclaim and it is here where all religious creeds, whatever their conflicting ideologies, meet and coalesce in one stream, flowing into the ocean of religiosity. This is true universalism and that is why the teachings of Gita are not for Hindus only but for all humanity, for all times to come. The Gita teaches that creed is for man and not man for creed and this principle of tolerance has permeated Hinduisim throughout its long history—even to a fault. The adoption of a creed is only a stage in the religious evolution of man. Let him adopt any creed that he likes and stick to it if it satisfies his mind and enables him to be religious in thought, word and deed. Let no one dislodge him from that creed so long as it consoles and ennobles his mind. "One should not unsettle the understanding of the ignorant, attached to action, the wise, steadily acting, should engage himself, in all work." (III 26). "Better is one's own *Dharma* though imperfect than the *Dharma* of another well-performed. He who does the duty ordained by his own nature incurs no evil." (XVIII 47, III 35). The meaning of these passages is that the first step in the ladder of the religious evolution of

a man is to do whatever the scriptures enjoin him to do. Then comes a stage when he asks himself the reason for following religious texts, next comes the stage when he should realise that the rituals and ceremonies of religion are but the means to an end. Having reached this stage, he should turn inwards and purify his mind by beginning to think and live religiously. When the mind is thus purified, it becomes a fit vehicle for imbibing the philosophical truths of life and thereafter comes the last stage when knowledge becomes so integrated, that he can even discard formal religion and by achieving in his mind the *Yoga* or union of all the three faculties, he establishes direct relation with God.

If we understand this approach of Gita, we can appreciate why it gives a subordinate place to rituals and formalities of religion. Worship of idols did exist before the advent of the *Aryans* in India and it is therefore most probable that idol worship was a part of the religion of the people even in the times of the Upanishads. But the Upanishads do not look upon it with much favour. They appreciate the use of symbols in realising the Absolute but do not see the need of substituting them by idols. They say "There is no likeness (Image) of Him." "*Purusha* is formless." The Gita is silent about idol worship but there is an indirect reference to it. "Whoever wishing devotion offers Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, that I accept—the devout gift of the pure-minded." (IX 26). It is generally included in the ritualistic portion of religion which is regarded

as a stage, though a lower stage, in the ascent to godliness.

This is the scheme of religious evolution according to the Gita and, indeed of the Hindu religion. It has its strong as well as weak sides. If the different steps are rightly understood and followed only as stages, they enable a person to rise higher and higher in the hierarchy of religious progress, but if the means is mistaken for the end and the steps as the final resting place, the progress is arrested and religion remains a formal institution. The Gita with a true psychological insight emphasises the need of going step by step but at the same time of keeping the eye upwards towards the final goal. A mere ascetic, a mere *Pandit*, a mere ritualist is one who has halted on the steps. He ought to rise higher and become a *Yogi*—an integrated personality—who does not feel the need of external stimuli and formal regimentation.

The Gita has described the various ways of becoming a *Yogi* in such a discursive manner that it has left people guessing whether it lays more stress on knowledge or devotion or *Karma*. If you read Chapter IV, you might conclude that the Gita has placed knowledge above all. If you read Chapter XII, you think that the path of devotion is regarded as the best and if you read Chapter III, you might say that the Gita lays the greatest emphasis on *Karma*. But if you read the whole Gita without any preconceived notion or subjective bias, it must be concluded that the *Yoga* of all the three is considered the best and the emphasis on one or the other is laid in the

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particular Chapter to induce persons of different mentalities to select the path which attracts their minds, begin the journey and realise later on, that it meets the other two paths on the way and then all people coming from different paths and meeting at the intermediate stages reach the end of their journey together.

We need not, therefore, trouble ourselves about the controversy that has been raised as to whether the Gita teaches the path of knowledge, devotion or action. As is well-known, Shankaracharya has with a good deal of analytical and local skill attempted to show that the Gita predominantly preaches the way of knowledge. Ramanujacharya, Vallabhacharya, Madhvacarya, Nimbarka and others have laid stress on the path of devotion while in recent times Lokamanya Tilak and others have interpreted the Gita's view as pre-eminently that of Action or Energetic work. It all depends from which angle we approach the Gita. Historically, it appears that the Gita has espoused the Krishna-Vasudev cult which was becoming popular in that age. It stands mid-way between the Upanishads and the Bhagavata eras. But the *Bhakti* of the Gita differs from that of *Bhagavata Purana*. It inclines more towards the meditative *Upasana* of the Upanishads than towards the emotional and personal devotion towards Krishna in the *Bhagavata*. In the Gita, *Bhakti* is not regarded as a part of the threefold *gunas*. It is noteworthy that although knowledge, *Karma*, intellect and various other qualities are described in their threefold qualities in

Chapter XVIII, *Bhakti* has not been divided into *Satvika*, *Rajasika* or *Tamasika*. That is because *Bhakti* is always regarded as pure; otherwise it cannot be devotion. That, however, does not mean that it must remain unintegrated. The Gita is at pains to show that a devotee has also to acquire knowledge and perform good actions before he becomes a real devotee. If we can imagine a picture of the threefold path of Gita, we may say that it is a Trimurti (Three-faced entity) with *Bhakti* in the middle and *Gnana* and *Karma* on both sides.

All religions believe in the Grace of God but they attach different meanings to it. Divine Grace is one of the chief doctrines of Christianity and so it is of the Gita. Although Christianity regards man as an image of God, it starts with man as a sinful creature and he can get redemption from his sins only if God bestows favour on him. The Gita regards man not merely as an image of God but as containing the essence of God in himself. Christianity lays stress on making efforts to rise upwards and praying for Divine Grace so that He may forgive man's sins. The Gita lays stress on making efforts not to sink down and on the need of not allowing the Divine element already existing in him to be weakened (VI 5). In doing so the Divine Grace will help him. "Even doing all actions, always taking refuge in Me—by My Grace he attains to the eternal immutable state." (XVIII 56). "Fixing thy mind in Me, thou shalt by My Grace, overcome all obstacles; but if from self-conceit thou wilt not hear Me, thou shalt perish."

(XVIII 58). "Therefore, take refuge in Him with all thy heart; by His Grace shalt Thou attain supreme peace and the eternal abode." (XVIII 62). This Grace does not descend on man arbitrarily but according to the laws propounded in the Gita. If these laws are observed with a pure mind, though by the weakness of nature a man may not be able to obey all of them, God will help him if his mind is filled with faith in Him. Faith is supposed to be a word peculiar to religious vocabulary and it is sometimes contrasted with scientific knowledge. Their spheres are no doubt distinct and we may say generally that faith begins where knowledge ends. But faith has no exclusive religious connotation. In every sphere of knowledge, we have to depend on faith. So long as man is not omniscient and his reason is limited in its application to the perceptions obtained through the senses, we will have to rely on faith even to support the knowledge we have acquired. The scientist finds out the laws of nature by observation and experiment. He will say that it is a Universal law that an object, if unsupported, will fall to the ground by the law of gravity; that electricity when passed through incandescent wires will produce light; that by the earth's rotation on its axis and its revolution around the sun, there will be a regular succession of days and nights, months and years. But how does he know that all these objects of nature will produce the same effect every time? How does he know that there is always regularity and uniformity in the operation of natural laws? How does he

know that in the same given set of circumstances, what has happened today will also happen tomorrow? It is here that we go from knowledge to faith. Whenever our knowledge is imperfect but our inner experience transcends it, we support it by faith. It must be rational faith—a faith not contrary to whatever reason asserts. But faith always transcends reason; otherwise it is not faith. Very often, we believe a thing to be true although we do not know how it is true. The quality of such belief or faith depends upon our knowledge and reason. The beliefs of a man of vast knowledge are generally rational and those of an ignorant man are often irrational. “A man is what he believes” says the Gita (XVII 3). His faith or *Shraddha* is according to his mental disposition and like all mental states, it has the threefold quality. “*Satvika* men worship the Gods; *Rajasika* men the *Yakshas* and the *Rakshasas*, and the *Tamasika* men the *Pretas* and the Ghosts.” (XVII 4). This idea expressed here in the language of religion means that people of a superior kind of faith follow the higher forces of nature, those of ordinary faith follow the turbulent forces and those of the lowest kind of faith follow the low and degrading forces. Thus faith is an important and indispensable element in a man's life and forms a ballast for keeping the ship of life steady in the stormy sea of the world. A number of our actions do not bear immediate results. We are very often baffled by extraordinary events which make us even doubt whether there is the rule of law and justice in the natural world. It is here that rational

faith comes in and buoys us up and helps us to retain our conviction in the moral government of the world. The true and the good always reside together. The word *Sat* is a common word for truth and goodness according to the Gita (XVII 26). "Whatever act of sacrifice, austerity or charity or *Karma* is steadfastly done for the sake of God, is *Sat* and whatever is done without steadfast faith is *Asat*, i.e. unreal and bad, here as well as hereafter." (XVII 26, 27).

We thus come to the conclusion that reason guided by knowledge, devotion and faith should always go together. The one without the others does not attain its fulfilment. Faith if true and *Satvika* is not a weakness but a strength of the human mind and combined with fortitude (*Dhruti*) strengthens the *Yoga* or union of all our mental and bodily functions enabling us to bear all the vicissitudes of life (XVIII 33). It creates a spirit of optimism in our mind without which there can be no joy in our life. It is often said by critics that Hinduism is a religion of pessimism and creates a feeling of despair and other-worldliness in the minds of its votaries. Nothing can be further from truth if we properly understand the fundamental principles of the Hindu Religion. It is the false belief of fatalism in which we have sunk ourselves and our perverted notion of the world being unreal that is responsible for a pessimistic outlook of life. The Gita proclaims that if its teachings are scrupulously followed, they are bound to produce equanimity and peace of mind which is nothing else but inner joy and happiness. It says that you need

not despair and give up worldly pursuits nor desire to die, to get salvation. It is in this world, in living a life of moderation and doing your duties disinterestedly and unattachedly, that you can learn the art of not merely getting happiness but pleasure in leading a balanced life. God will not ultimately let you down if you follow His laws; you must only identify yourself completely with *Sat* and *Chit*, i.e. whatever is good and true. If you do so, you will surely acquire the other quality of the Trinity, viz. *Ananda* or joy. This is not pessimism but optimism of a superior kind, based not on some favour coming from outside but from the inner, robust and rational faith, that whatever bitterness or misfortunes we may experience in doing our duties, it is a part of our life and will ultimately bring us joy and happiness.

If one is still pessimistic about the existence of evil in this world, the Gita soothes the mind by assuring us that the preponderance of evil is self-destructive. The spiritual evolution of humanity moves in cycles but this cycle is not a vicious circle; it is the circle of a screw or a spiral, which at the end of each circulatory motion, takes us upwards. When evil goes on accumulating, each cycle is moving to its inevitable end and a new force arises which destroys the accumulated evil, and completes the cycle. This is the doctrine of *Avatar*, the descent of God, the spiritual force in the world to destroy evil. It is only a metaphorical descent. Really, it is the Universal Soul, which is released from its dormancy by forces opposing the evil that bursts forth and

sets aright the equilibrium between good and evil. Krishna assures Arjuna: "Whenever there is decline of religion and rise of irreligion then I create a vehicle for my Self for the protection of the good and for destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of religion, I come into being in every age." (IV 7, 8). This can be interpreted in two ways; in the traditional way of Hindu mythology or in a general way. According to Hindu mythology there have been ten *Avatars* of God in different ages, in animal as well as human forms. It may be appropriately interpreted in a general way also. There have been crucial stages in the evolution of the human species when according to supernatural law, the divine element has to assert itself to restore the balance of progress by counteracting the forces of reaction and disintegration. Just as the conscious force bursts forth through natural channels in the evolution of different species, the spiritual element bursts forth through the human soul to create a spiritual revolution. The spirit of the age, as we call it, is incarnated in a human soul to such an extraordinary degree that it is nearer the Divine Force than any other. Such a soul through which the Divine element is revealed to us guides and inspires humanity to develop our strength to subjugate the forces of evil. Thus are all prophets and spiritual leaders of the world born with a mission to purify the souls of men and remind them of their duties in the world. This incarnation of the Divine reassures mankind that in the Cosmic law of God, it is the good

that triumphs over evil and saves humanity from dying a spiritual death. The history of human evolution is a story of constant conflict between opposing forces in which sometimes good and sometimes evil preponderates, but when evil becomes unbearable the dormant soul of man is awakened by a spiritual leader and becomes sufficiently strong to destroy the evil.

CHAPTER IX

THE GITA AND MODERN SCIENCE

IN former times, people lived for their religion and also died for it. In the present time, people are so busy with other things that they have no time to live for religion, much less to die for it. Its very existence in human life is in danger and it has got to fight on two fronts. Some people attack religion on the ground that it is a mental dope which has beguiled the world into a nightmare of superstitious beliefs. Some others hold that what cannot be tested by microscope, telescope and test-tubes cannot be believed to be true. The first of these attacks arises out of frustration at the chaos caused by the conflict of religious creeds and the only remedy which is supposed to stop the conflict is to strike at the roots of religion. It is a powerful reaction against the deterioration caused by the worn out forces of the external manifestations of religion which are mistaken for religion itself. It is, however, a passing phase which is bound to disappear after it exhausts itself, because the religious spirit in man can never be killed. If it is driven out by the front door, it creeps in by the back door. People who want to kill religion as it exists can do so only by adopting another ideology which itself becomes a religion with them. In the background of every ideology, there is a conception of a world force which governs the lives of men. There may be different beliefs in the different stages of the evolution of humanity about

the nature of these forces. They may be installed on a spiritual plane or a temporal plane according to the prevailing mentality of the period. It may be either soul force or sole force. But there must be belief in that force to sustain the ideology and that belief becomes a kind of religion with those who practise it. How long such a form of religion lasts depends on its inherent strength or weakness in sustaining the faith of man. If it itself ends in a sense of frustration from which it was originally born, it must give place to another form of faith which would satisfy the new ideology of the people. But faith cannot be annihilated from the minds of men and therefore religion which is nothing but faith in the vital force of nature cannot be rooted out from the lives of human beings. We are thus driven to the necessity of discovering the real and ultimate nature of that force and find out what are its sanctions—whether the ultimate sanctions proceed from human force or a higher cosmic force of which the human force is but a subordinate instrument.

The second attack on religion comes from a quarter which does recognise a cosmic force or energy in nature but professes agnosticism, if not complete atheism, about its spiritual nature. This opinion is represented by the average natural scientist who is so much enamoured of the scientific method of studying nature that, according to him, anything which cannot be known by that method, is irrational knowledge or mysticism as opposed to sound knowledge. This was the attitude of the first batch

of Western scientists like Darwin, Huxley, Spencer and others who propounded the theory of evolution in nature. According to this theory nature evolves from the lower forms of life to higher forms in the general struggle for existence. The law of the survival of the fittest prevailed in the whole of nature and any species which could adopt itself to its environment survived and the rest died out in course of time. Life was determined by the organic changes which nature brought about in bodies and thus material forms determined the evolution of mind which was regarded as a condition of the brain. It was the brain that determined the evolution of mind and not *vice versa*. As a rule, man had no free will but was determined by natural forces. Material law thus prevailed in nature and human development was determined by biological changes, as man evolved from monkeys. This theory held the field for a long time and became the basis of many other theories about life. However, as the succeeding generations of scientists went deeper into the mysteries of life, they found that the theory could not satisfactorily explain how matter can by itself evolve life and condition its manifestations. Oliver Lodge, Rutherford, Thomson and a number of eminent scientists practically reversed the theory and their researches led them to the conclusion that it was not matter that evolved mind and determined its existence but that it was mind or rather life that gradually unfolded itself through matter which is only a vehicle for the embodiment of life. It is consciousness that

bursts forth through physical nature and conditions its organic forms. Just as a torrent of river flows from a mountain on the plains and while making its way towards the sea, conditions the forms of its banks and its courses, so does consciousness fashion the organic bodies and enliven nature through its evolution to the goal of life. With further researches in nature, the climax comes with the Atomic theory and Einstein's theory of Relativity. Eminent physical scientists have now come to the conclusion that each atom of matter is a store house of energy and is a miniature solar system in which its component parts are constantly revolving round the central nucleus with greater or less velocity which determines its density. This has led them to conclude that what we see as a stationary object with our eyes is not stationary but its atoms are in a state of perpetual motion and when split up, let loose tremendous energy; and that in the ultimate analysis, matter is nothing but crystallised energy or spirit. It follows therefore that the world as seen by us is not the world as it really is. In fact motion, life, consciousness and self-consciousness are degrees or stages in the evolution of the fundamental spirit and there is no essential difference between matter with life and matter without life. These researches have confirmed the opinion of Sir Oliver Lodge that "The organism is the index or denominator of something beyond itself, something which, though it may be said to be incarnate matter has its more real and personal existence in some other region". The theory leads

to the conclusion that the whole universe is a vast biological organism and each small organism in the universe is its component part. It is one principle, call it energy or call it soul, that permeates and vibrates through the universe and there is therefore one unity which manifests itself through the diversity of changing phenomena. The well-known mathematician, Einstein has by his theory of relativity upset our notions of space and time. He has shown that space and time do not exist independently of our mind, they are our limited notions for measuring immensity and eternity. Time is one of the dimensions of the four dimensioned space which again is a relative notion having no existence outside our minds. Everything that appears is relative to other objects and our knowledge of nature is therefore relative and not absolute knowledge.

Thus from the materialistic science of the Darwin age, we have arrived at the non-materialistic science of the present day. I do not call it spiritual, because Natural science has not to cross the border line between non-materialistic and spiritual forces. That is the subject of philosophy. Natural sciences formulate their laws and deductions and describe the laws of nature pertaining to their own field. It is not for them to usurp the function of philosophy. The task of co-ordinating and integrating all the known laws of nature into a synthetic system is the task of philosophy. The study of natural sciences is essential for philosophic thought because they supply materials for testing the truth of the unseen

world and act also as a check against purely speculative tendencies of metaphysical systems.

The recent tendency of the modern science to dematerialise matter can be illustrated by quotations from the writings of several contemporary scientists. It will be sufficient here to quote the views of an eminent scientist, Sir Richard Gregory, who has been described as "the spokesman of contemporary science" and was for many years the editor of the well-known scientific journal, 'Nature'. He summarises his conclusions about the relation of science and philosophy in the concluding chapter of his book "Gods and Men." He says "Studies of the atom and of the universe have made metaphysics an essential part of physical theory, and philosophic speculations have suggested and assisted profitable lines of enquiry in practical fields What was formerly purely metaphysical speculation has thus become a principle of natural philosophy. Developments in atomic physics seem to rule out the mechanical idea of determinism in Nature, and the acceptance of this view brings physical theory into field of discussion of the philosophical and theological aspects of free will and determinism or of the associated doctrine of predestination. During the last fifty years the scope of scientific thought has been gradually extended. Mechanical principles are still usefully employed to describe natural structures and processes but not to explain them. The membrane between the exact and the descriptive sciences—between Philosophy and science—has been dissolved, and a sounder and more

philosophic view of mechanism in Nature is now taken. This change has been brought about by modern work and conceptions in the field of physical science and biological thought has been profoundly affected by it." Proceeding further, he says "while, however, the purpose of science is to press forward to the discovery of new truths, that of religion is to protect and maintain belief in the origin and end of natural processes The best plan is to think of these diverse faiths as threads to be woven in time into a single rope connecting the earth with heaven, or mind and matter. This, however, implies the abandonment by each dogmatic religion of the claim to unique revealed truth and its special divine relationships with particular communities."

After describing the progress from animism to monotheism, he proceeds: "This involves, however, the assumption which may or may not be justifiable that monotheism does really represent the higher form of belief of which man has yet shown himself capable. This would be in accordance with Western Philosophy which seeks to formulate a single principle or influence as basis in the universe—the Absolute—to be worshipped as a Supreme Being or reduced by science to a single physical force like that which binds the atoms of all substances together." The author is probably referring to the Absolute which the German philosopher, Hegel, installed in his philosophical scheme of the universe. He does not, however, seem to have studied our Vedanta system. If he had studied it or at least read the books of

Max Muller, Paul Deussen and others, he would have got a new light in his search for the Absolute as the basic principle in the universe.

As regards survival after death, the author has something interesting to say. "Though science is unable to provide any positive evidence for survival of personality after death, it must acknowledge that belief in such survival can be an effective factor in human development. It is just permissible, therefore, to assume that another world awaits habitation by an exalted spirit of humanity after this earth has come to an end as it is to believe in the eternal survival of personality. Whatever functions may be held as to the future of man or humanity, the standard of goodness is decided by the community. It is better to learn to do the right thing, that is a duty to ourselves and to others than to make fear of punishment the code of conduct. The man who lives a model life merely because he wishes to save his soul is not taking a high standard of spiritual action, for his motive is personal profit. He may believe he will be saved from punishment hereafter by being negative to evil, but his life will be of no benefit to the human race unless he is positively good." Sir Richard Gregory has not probably heard of the Gita or at least he does not seem to have read it. If he had, he would have seen that the Gita propounds the view which he is advocating here. The Gita says that good moral conduct is to be practised not out of personal profit, not merely to save one's own soul but to save the collective soul of humanity. ?

The motive for good conduct is not reward but purification of the soul.

After laying stress on humanism to be adopted as a common religion of humanity, the author concludes: "Ethical or Philosophical humanism takes account of all these factors of cultural development, secular or sacred. It understands very clearly that the earth is but a temporary home not only for the short space of individual life but also for the whole human race. As tenants or trustees, our duties are to make the best use of the resources of our heritage by the exercise of all our talents and with the belief and hope that by doing so, we are helping to make men sublime morally and spiritually as well as Godly in the sense of religious faith. So may the earth become part of the heavens of the universe in spirit as it is already in truth". The Gita puts this teaching of humanism in its own way. "With the mind purified by devotion to performance of action, and the body conquered and the senses subdued one who realises one's self as the Self in all beings, though acting, is not tainted". (V 7).

No apology is needed for quoting these passages at length from the views of an acknowledged spokesman of modern science, because they show how, after years of experiments and observations of nature, modern science has come very near the views propounded by the Vedantic school of Indian Philosophy after profound meditation for centuries. It is idle to suggest that modern science confirms every doctrine of Indian Thought; it is equally wrong to suggest

that the views of Indian Philosophy about *Brahman* and Soul surviving after death are fantastic. Both are extreme views born out of ignorance, pre-possession or prejudice.

A good deal of what the ancients—Western as well as Eastern—conceived about the composition of the elements of nature is now obsolete. Chemical, physical and biological sciences have shed new light on the structure and properties of substances as well as organisms, but the deeper we go into the recesses of nature, the greater becomes the conviction that there is one fundamental element sustaining the whole world. The Indian sages did not and could not express their ideas in the precise scientific terminology of the modern age. Their ideas are clothed in a poetic and figurative language but behind that outer garb, they have expressed some eternal truths of life which modern science has expressed in scientific terminology. Any student of natural science who reads the Gita with an open mind, in the light of what we have discussed before, can discover for himself the underlying thoughts common to the Gita and modern scientific researches. It is for International institutions of the type of *UNESCO* to pursue this subject further and see how far ancient Indian thought can contribute to a common humanistic philosophy of life.

We have seen in a former chapter the nature of the psychological approach and the hypothesis of *Karmavada* which are a peculiar feature of Indian Philosophy. Experimental psychology and psychical research is a growing science in the Western coun-

tries. The subjects of *yogic* exercises, survival after death and re-incarnation are being studied with more interest than before. More and more persons who have made a deep study of these subjects are converted to the principles underlying the writings of ancient Indian Philosophers, though they may be unable to wholly accept everything contained in them. Yeats, Brown, Paul Brunton, Shaw Desmond and a number of other occidental writers have published their experiences, after not merely studying but practising the introspective methods of *yoga sutras*. The scientific mind naturally fights shy of mysticism because it is accustomed to the concrete elements in nature and so carefully avoids the abstractions of thought. Mere speculative and imaginary ideas without being based on the known and verified laws of nature may land one on mysticism pure and simple and satisfy one's own mind having a prepondering emotional element. But that is not the only form of mysticism. There is another kind of mysticism to which even the scientific mind with a stock of knowledge obtained by a study of concrete substances arrives when it leaves the microscope and the test tubes and begins to think about ideas and concepts of all natural sciences, weaves them into a synthetic web of unified knowledge and then passes on from objective knowledge to subjective knowledge. After having exhausted the knowledge of all objects in the world, one must at the end come to the question: what about the knowledge of that by which I know? There, we cross the threshold between the outer and

the inner nature and come to apply entirely different standards to ascertain truth. Mysticism of this type is inevitable when we come to the final stage of realising in our own minds that which we cannot know by the methods of natural science. It is a sort of mysticism to a natural scientist in spite of the fact that it has a rational basis for it, because as we have seen, what we call knowledge of the self and ultimate reality, is a process of self-realisation which cannot be acquired merely by syllogistic reasoning but by the intuitive method of Yoga of all our faculties in introspective thought. This sort of mysticism is different from emotional or ecstatic mysticism where the love for God is so much stimulated in the mind that everything in the world is forgotten. Although the Gita does speak of self-surrender to God in devotion, it does not propagate this purely emotional kind of mysticism. On the other hand, it urges men to be practical and lays emphasis on the need of discharging worldly duties even with a devotional mentality. The mysticism of the Gita is of the former type as a *yoga* of knowledge, devotion and action. Indeed, that is the mysticism, in greater or less degree, of every philosophy which places mind and reason below the soul.

It is here that Indian Philosophy is supposed to come into conflict, with modern science. Science stops with reason and refuses to bring any other agency to work on scientific problems. That is a correct attitude for the method of compartmental knowledge. The conflict arises only when science

adopts the same method for acquiring every kind of knowledge and becomes dogmatic in asserting that nothing can be worth knowing except by that method. There would be no such conflict if natural science realises its limitations and keeps an open mind for tackling the problems which do not fall within its sphere. It had to modify its attitude towards its own problems with more and more researches in the natural field and looking to the manner in which its theories are propounded today only to be given up tomorrow with further discoveries, we are still far from solving the riddle of universe by the purely scientific methods. At the same time students of metaphysical philosophy should give up their ivory-tower attitude and come out of their purely speculative mentality. The manner in which philosophy is taught in our colleges and Universities leaves much to be desired. It is taught as if it were entirely unconnected with science. Philosophy is not worth the name unless it is based on an integrated knowledge of nature as supplied by the sciences and religion is not true religion unless it is based on philosophic knowledge. That is what the Gita proclaims when it says that knowledge is an essential ingredient of religion and true knowledge is that by which the One undestructible substance is seen in all beings, inseparable in the separated. (XVIII 20). "Of all the knowledges, I am the knowledge of the self, (X 32). Imperishable, yet it exists as if divided in being; it is to be known as sustaining beings, devouring as well as generating them". (XIII 16). If the author

of the Gita had been living today, he would have welcomed our progress in unravelling the mysteries of nature and preached to the people to realise God through this vast and manifold knowledge.

Let me repeat that this is not an attempt to read all the discoveries of modern science into the Gita. That would be a tall claim to make. Truth is one but it is many-sided, and there are different ways of arriving at truth. With the increase in the stock of knowledge, each age is trying to revise the notions of previous ages to get nearer the ultimate truth. The Gita itself did the same thing when it gave a new synthesis of the problems of life after the Upanishads. We are doing the same thing in the present age with our accumulated knowledge. Truth is being examined from new standpoints in every age. But its essence remains the same amidst the multiplicity of its aspects. It would not therefore be surprising if the same ideas are expressed in different and more precise terms in succeeding ages. We must for that reason make some allowance for the Gita expressing its principles in the language of the religious and social atmosphere prevailing at that time. If after doing so, they receive support from our present-day knowledge and are found to be not only useful but even necessary today, it is a special circumstance which would justify us in the study and practice of its precepts even in the present age. Krishna tells Arjuna that the *Art of Yoga* which he was teaching to him was not a new art but a lost art which was taught by him to Vivasvat, but which after a long

lapse of time had come to be forgotten (IV 12). So does it appear to have been forgotten now twenty-five centuries after Krishna taught it to Arjuna. Let us now see whether today it is a lost but useful art and if so, whether it needs to be revived.

CHAPTER X

THE GITA AND THE MODERN AGE

If we wish to appraise the history of old human institutions like religion, we must take them in their proper perspective. All the prevailing principal religions of the world, Hinduism with its offshoots, Jainism and Buddhism, Christianity, Mohammedanism Judaism, and Zoroastrianism are professed as revealed religions either through one prophet or a number of seers. Their followers regard them as sacred because they believe them to be old and inspired, some persons have no faith in them because they believe them to be old and effete and some others regard religion itself as a human weakness which has retarded the progress of mankind. All these three types of persons make different approaches and understand religion in different senses. The first type of men believes that whatever is revealed is eternally true and the second type takes religion only in the sense of its outer forms and institutions which have become soulless and out of spirit with the times. The third type refuses to believe in anything which cannot be tested by reason and therefore identifies religion with pure superstition. We are concerned here with the first two types only, as we are dealing primarily with the religion of the Gita. Those who do not believe in any religion may follow whatever they regard as their own faith. So far as Hindu culture is concerned, it is so tolerant that it has regarded any kind of faith which may not believe even in a personal

God, as a religious philosophy of life, provided it believes in the supremacy of spirit over matter.

The first two types of opinion are partly true. Each religion contains two elements—one permanent and the other evanescent varying with the times. The permanent element consists of fundamental truths which are believed to be true for all times. The other element consists of forms and outward observances of religion which may vary from time to time even among the people practising the same religion. Both these elements have existed in Hinduism from the earliest times and have divided it into Philosophic Hinduism and Popular Hinduism. Even in the early Vedic Age, these two elements existed side by side though the principal form of religious observance was the performance of sacrifices. In the Upanishadic age, the philosophic element became prominent but the masses were in need of a popular outlet for their religious feelings. A religious code was necessary for them and it was supplied by various *Smritis* which contained elaborate directions about the observance of religious injunctions, in all departments of life. They were all-comprehensive and comprised minute directions for the individual as well as the social conduct of men. The observance of all these directions was considered to be a part of *Dharma*, i.e. religion in its widest sense. Considerable emphasis was laid on the division of society into four *Varnas*, according to their social obligations, to preserve the purity of the Aryan race and it became a distinctive feature of Hinduism in its struggle for

self-preservation against the non-Aryan population of the country. With the advent of the non-Vedic off-shoots, Jainism and Buddhism which did not recognise the *Varnas* and sacrificial rites, the Vedic Religion had to appeal to popular imagination for keeping men within the Vedic fold. The two great classics of Hinduism, Ramayana, and Mahabharata as well as a number of *Puranas* which are allegorical stories as well as histories of the Hindu race, contributed a great deal to the capturing of popular imagination and to supply them with inspiring ideals for their daily life. The Vedas and the Upanishads containing the philosophic side of religion remained in the background, to be studied by the learned few while the various *Smritis* and *Dharma Shastras*, the Classics and the *Puranas* became the Hindu Code of life. Out of these grew, in course of time, numerous subsidiary sects and creeds of Hinduism which became a source of its strength in some and weakness in other matters. During all these centuries, the Aryan civilization was influenced by the pre-Aryan population of the country as well as the non-Aryan people like Scythians, Greeks, Shakas, Huns, etc., who came for conquest or trade and settled in India. This wave of emigrants was absorbed in the Aryan fold and in course of time they adopted the Hindu faith, not without imparting their own influence to the Hindu institutions. But it was the pre-Aryan customs and manners of life which exerted a good deal of influence not only on the Hindu culture but on religion also. The recent discoveries at Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa have

thrown a flood of new and unexpected light on the nature of the pre-Aryan culture known as Indus Valley Civilization, which was in existence in India long before the Aryans came here. The experts are inclined to the view that this civilization was not confined to the Indus Valley but had penetrated further South among the Dravidians also and although the Aryans had to fight against the non-Aryan people of India and ultimately subjugated them, the religious customs and manners of the latter had considerable effect on the Aryan life. One of the most prominent of these effects was the practice of idol-worship. Neither in the Vedas nor in the Upanishads is there any distinct reference to idol worship as an Aryan institution; on the other hand, as we have seen before, it is referred to with disfavour in some of the Upanishads. The Aryans worshipped Gods through symbols but not through idols. The gradual introduction of the institution in the Hindu religion came from pre-Aryan culture. Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji has discussed this subject and summarised his conclusions in his "Hindu Civilization" as follows:—

"Thus the religion of the Indus people comprised (1) The worship of the Mother Goddess or Shakti; (2) The worship of a deity, the ancestor of Shiva; (3) Worship of Animals, natural, semi-human, or fabulous; (4) Worship of trees in their natural state or of their in-dwelling spirits; (5) Worship of inanimate stones or other objects; of *linga* and *yonis* symbols; (6) Chrematheism as illus-

trated in the worship of the sacred "incense-burners"; (7) Faith in amulets and charms indicative of *Demonophobia*; and (8) Practice of Yoga. It will be seen from these characteristics that this religion in spite of a few foreign elements already noticed, was mainly an indigenous growth and "the lineal progenitor of Hinduism", which is still marked by some of these features, the cults of *Shakti* and *Shiva*, of the *Nagas*, of animal, trees, stone-worship, of phallism and yoga."

With the spread of Shaivism by the *Pashupata* cult and Vaishnavism by the *Bhagavata* cult, the idol worship of Shiva and Vishnu in various forms, installed in magnificent temples of great architectural beauty was established in all parts of India along with the temples of several Goddesses representing the forces of Nature. The Vedic deities, Indra, Varuna, Agni, Sun and others, who are worshipped through sacrifices, receded into the background and their places were taken by Puranic deities, who were worshipped through their idols with very elaborate ceremonies in temples. This substitution of gods provided the popular element in the Hindu religion and satisfied millions of people. It succeeded in weakening the hold of Buddhism which had spread far and wide in India for nearly twelve centuries. At the same time Hinduism absorbed several characteristic features of Buddhism, like compassion, non-violence, austerity etc., and also accepted Buddha as one of the incarnations of Hindu gods. Thus although Buddhism disappeared as a popular religion

Did Hinduism take things from Buddhism? or Buddhism take things from Hinduism? or are in mixture? when was it made?

from India, Buddha himself remained as an Avatar of God. But on the philosophic side of religion, the credit of reviving Vedic religion against the spread of Buddhism goes to the great Shankaracharya and other exponents of the various schools of Vedanta Darshanas, who gave a new orientation to the Upanishadic Vedanta and put the Hindu religion on the high philosophic pedestal on which it stands today.

The substance of this history is that Hinduism at the present day is not merely a religious creed, but a moral and social code of life, consisting of numerous and conflicting dogmas, giving rise to rival sects and schools of thought. It produced institutions which were evolved in one set of circumstances but which ceased to fulfil their purpose with the change of environment. This distinctive feature of Hinduism has been, through centuries of its varying fortunes, its sources of strength in some matters but of weakness in others. Being impersonal in its sanctions, Hinduism derived its injunctions from treatises written from time to time which cannot, in some matters, be reconciled with each other and which lent their authority to all sorts of religious 'isms' from monotheism to atheism and all sorts of religious practices from *Yoga* to animism. It is this peculiar feature of Hinduism that has earned for itself the highest praise as well as severest condemnation according to that part of its all-comprehensive system which the critic has in view. It fostered a spirit of tolerance and created an atmosphere of live and let live. It supplied spiritual solace and satisfaction to persons of different degrees

of mental evolution and even conflicting views of life. This spirit of tolerance in turn developed the qualities of patience and forbearance which have enabled the Hindus to bear with rare courage the calamities and vicissitudes of life and to survive other communities with more vitality of body but less capacity for suffering. For that very reason, however, it has not given the Hindus a rallying cry and with it a cementing and aggressive spirit which some of the other religious systems have done, with the result that it did not create among its followers a militant brotherhood but only a loose combination of hierarchical classes or castes which regard one another's functions as exclusive and limited to their own social welfare. As long as the conquering tribes which penetrated India in early times were not actuated by a militant religious spirit, Hinduism defeated its own conquerors who were subjugated by its superior and catholic culture and were gradually absorbed into the Hindu fold. But it could not protect itself against its later conquerors with an aggressive and proselytizing spirit who followed their conquests with mass conversions and temple destruction. And then followed that clash of culture which entirely changed the life which Hindus led in their glorious past. Crushed under the weight of political domination, the Hindu culture was partially paralysed and ceased to adapt itself to the changing circumstances as it did in the days of its independence. It became rigid and stagnant. In its desire to survive against frequent attacks from outside, it withdrew into its own shell

and stuck to its social and religious institutions with a conservative state of mind, till at last it appeared to be more a culture of prohibition and inhibition than of progress and evolution. Its core was in course of time so covered with its crust that its substance became unrecognisable. Then came its contact with Western culture and modes of life which became more and more intensive as well as extensive, with the growth of the present system of education in India. One good thing that it did was, that in the beginning, it attracted eminent Western scholars to make a study of Hindu civilization and their researches revealed for the first time to the Western world that the real Hindu culture was not what it appeared to be on a superficial view of its social and religious institutions but that it rested on a philosophic theory of life which, for its moral conviction and spiritual satisfaction could not be easily dislodged by any other system of metaphysical thought. After the first reaction resulting from contact with Western culture had subsided, the spirit of nationalism began to permeate our cultural life and we began to be conscious of the fact that our real culture lay hidden beneath our time-worn institutions. The demand for its revival grew with the realisation of the truth that Western civilization had not succeeded in solving the deeper problems of life on its spiritual side, and that the solution which Hinduism offers to them has been misunderstood and even misrepresented. This revival requires a correct appreciation of the essential elements of Hindu philosophy consisting of everlasting truths.

of life and their separation from beliefs and institutions which have a secondary or subsidiary value.

This brief survey is relevant to the question as to what is the place of the Gita in the modern age. Has it any lesson to teach more than twenty-five centuries after it was composed when the Hindu civilization and institutions have gone through a radical change? If in spite of all changes human nature remains what it was and if the Gita has anything to teach us about human nature, it must be admitted that it has not merely a present but a perennial value for all human beings. It is quite true that the forms of social and religious institutions which the Gita describes and enjoins people to follow are no longer in existence. Sacrificial religion has given place to worship in temples. *Varnas* have disappeared and been substituted by castes and sub-castes, social customs and economic as well as political conditions have radically changed, the four *Ashramas* of Hindu life have become obsolete, our knowledge of the natural world has replaced old and crude notions by scientific laws. But still the Cosmic laws operating in the Universe, the nature of the human mind and the limited power of our faculties, the constant conflict between our lower and higher nature, the paramount importance of purifying our minds from all animal propensities, a strong social sense for regarding all men as members of one humanity who are all governed by the same laws of inner nature, the need for practising moral virtues which are common to all men, the supreme need of having a philosophy of life

which would not only give us courage to bear our misfortunes but also enable us to fulfil the mission of life as human beings and finally the importance of making religion a matter of inner life rather than of outer forms—all these considerations remain as true, as important and as imperative—perhaps more so today, in some cases—than they were in the Gita Age. The reader will now appreciate why the various aspects of the Gita have been discussed in the former Chapters. The main object is to show that in spite of its attempt to reconcile the prevailing religious notions of the age, the teachings of the Gita have a perennial interest for all. The principal points of its importance even today are (1) the emphasis on inner religion, (2) the importance of work and duty, (3) a sense of non-attachment towards the material side of life, (4) need for disinterested service and social sense and (5) development of humanitarian ideals. We shall now discuss these points one by one.

The first point about the emphasis on inner religion is even more important today than in the days of the Gita. One of the main themes of the Gita was to shift the emphasis from sacrifice by means of material objects to sacrifice by way of knowledge and by a renunciatory spirit, that is, from outer and ceremonial religion to the inner religion of moral uplift. According to the Gita, the practice of ceremonial religion is rewarded only by the temporary pleasures of heaven from which people have to come back to earth to work out their *Karma*. If any ceremonial worship is thought to be necessary, even offering of a leaf, a

flower and a fruit, or even water is enough for that purpose. (IX 26). It is not even essential to conduct elaborate rites to please God. He is worshipped much better obeying His laws which govern all relations between man and man. Krishna wanted Arjuna to revive that lost art. Whether the art was really revived or not, we do not know definitely. But it does appear that it is again lost in the ritualism of the succeeding ages. There is a general tendency in all religions to become more formal as they become older. This tendency creates a spirit of reform and readjustment of the forms of its observance. The Vedic religion has undergone that process in the course of centuries of its existence. Jainism, Buddhism, Shikhism, Veera-Shaivism, Bhrahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, are most of the cults and creeds which have arisen in India as a protest against the prevailing forms in which the Hindu religion was practised, and some of them went even outside the pale of Vedic Religion. Millions of people did adhere to the Vedic Religion but its practice became more and more formal and ritualistic. After all, outer religion in the form of ceremonies is meant as a support of inner religion and not as its substitute. Every religion has its ceremonial side, but it requires to be restricted in its forms and regulated so as to fulfil its true function of being a means and not an end by itself. Too much of outer religion at the expense of inner religion disturbs the balance of religious life and tends to make it mechanical instead of a live force as it ought to be. In the result, the gulf between philosophic Hinduism and

popular Hinduism has become too wide. The religious impulse to a virtuous life for its own sake and springing from inner conviction gives place to the popular forms of religious observances for gaining merit in this and the next world or to ease one's conscience for breaking the rules of morality and the laws of God. It is no wonder that the present machine age has tended to make the observances of religion also as a mechanical method. Most outsiders judge Hinduism not by its philosophic foundation of which they know precious little but by the religious customs and institutions of the people. To them, idolatry is a heathen form of worship which has survived in India for the profit of the priestly classes. This criticism is only partly true. To the Hindus, the worship of God through images and natural forces has a spiritual fervour and mental satisfaction which it is difficult to imagine by those who have not felt them. It has given them a means for the manifestation of the intense religious devotion and the preservation of the religious background behind their daily lives. But although it has this important psychological value, it has also its drawbacks. The worship of God through idols has not been regarded by the ancient Hindu sages as the only or the best means for obtaining spiritual enlightenment. It is regarded only as a stage in the religious evolution of the individual. The Hindu theory of life recognises that all individuals are not in the same stage of mental development and that each person should therefore, have such means of satisfying his religious impulse as would suit his

mental calibre. For persons who have developed capacity for rational thought, the Hindu religion has supplied higher forms of religious practices like *Yoga* and other introspective method of spiritual elevation. Idol worship is not thus a religious obligation for all Hindus. It is only a lower stage of worship to be discarded when the mind has reached a higher stage of mental development. At the same time, we have to take a realistic view of human limitations and it must be recognised that, however much we may wish to do away with idol worship, it has taken such a deep root in the minds of the masses since ancient times that it will not loosen its hold till our priests and preceptors instil into the minds of the people the greater need of ethical religion than ceremonial religion and lead them into it. Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj were unsuccessful in persuading people to give up idolatry altogether; their methods did not appeal to them. The reform must come mainly from those persons who have a hold on the minds of people just as the Upanishadic seers urged the people to turn their minds from the outer religion of Vedic ceremonials to the inner religion of spiritual uplift.

Priests and preceptors have still a great influence on the bulk of the people and it is they who should be well educated in the fundamental principles of our religious philosophy if the mentality of the people is to be changed. It is here that the Gita has a great lesson for the preachers of Hindu religion as well as the people. The Ethics and Religion of the Gita are

B.G.—12.

inseparable. When the Gita urges the people to give up religious creeds and go straight to God, it gives a clear hint to all religious preceptors to lead the people from the conflicting dogmas and other forms of the religion to the inner religion of the mind and heart. That is why the teachings of the Gita have even greater importance today than they had in the past.

The second important teaching of the Gita which is as valuable today as in the past is the emphasis it lays on the necessity to work and perform actions having the force of duties. According to the Gita, man is born to labour and to work, without which he cannot live and none can ever rest for even an instant without performing some voluntary or involuntary action. It is the force of the *Gunas* of *Prakriti* in us which compel us not to rest but go on working. We can never reach perfection by merely giving up work and *Naishkarmya*, i.e. worklessness does not consist in the non-performance of work but in doing it without any motive for its fruits. (III 4 to 8). The obligation to work extends to all spheres of life and not merely to religious duties. Neither running away from the obligatory duties of life nor a life of ease and comfort in which work is eliminated as much as possible is the way to get self-realisation or even happiness. If man does not work, he does not merely harm himself but also the community in which he lives because he profits by the work of others without contributing his own share. How much more true is it at the present day when one's obligations are not

merely confined to one's own caste or country but to humanity in general which is being knit in one unit as the world is drawing closer and closer. The *Karma* of which the Gita speaks is no doubt primarily religious duties and secondarily social duties. That was in accordance with the notions prevailing in that age. But the general principle and form in which it has preached, it is so comprehensive that it would apply to all actions which are regarded as essential duties from age to age. These duties vary according to the evolution of society and are considered obligatory for its preservation or progress at any particular period. Every age has its religion or *Yuga-Dharma*. The present age is indeed far remote from the age of the Gita. The Hindu culture has become a composite one. Contact with other countries of the world has changed the social, economic and political life of our people. Our notions about the values of things of life have radically changed. The present industrial and scientific age has revolutionised our manner of living. When India was a land of comparative peace and plenty, work did not primarily consist in the struggle to procure the necessary means of livelihood. The stress was therefore on religious duties. In the present industrial age, work for keeping up the standard of living or even body and soul together in the general conflict of interests throughout the world is felt to be more urgent than work for religious merits. The social equilibrium has been radically upset. At the one end we have a class of idle rich who think work is not for them, but for

the toiling masses; then there are the rich who think that they must work more in order to get still more wealth; there is a large majority of people who have to work a good deal for maintaining themselves and their family before they can think of doing disinterested work for others. Then there are persons who want to work but cannot get work in this machine age and finally at the extreme end, there are persons who can work and can get work but who do not wish to work but to live a life of ease and idleness on the credulity and misplaced charity of religious-minded people: Thus the two extremes, the idle rich and the idle beggars, who do no work, are both products of two different kinds of our social life, one, the extreme form of capitalistic industrialism and the other, a false sense of religious pietism. This upsetting of our social equilibrium and the consequent change of values has resulted in giving religion a secondary place in our life. But man's duty to work for himself as well as for others still remains an obligation of a religious nature and the stress which the Gita lays on *Karma* is more valuable today than it was ever before, because with the increasing population and the requirements of life, no man can live without work. However, if the upsetting of values is to be corrected and religion is to be given its proper place in life, our mental approach to work which we have to do in the present state of the world, requires to be changed and the way shown by the Gita deserves to be seriously considered by us all. That brings us to the third of the five precepts of the Gita which we

narrated before, viz., a sense of non-attachment.

We have just seen that although work is the lot of man from which he cannot escape, the kind and amount of work which has a religious obligation depends on our sense of values in life. The industrial revolution in the world has created a vicious circle. Mass production of articles of necessity as well as luxury has increased our wants. Life has become costlier, and with the growing inflation of money everywhere, the average man has to spend more than he can earn, if he wants to satisfy even his reasonable wants. Our notions of comforts and convenience have enhanced the temptations to enjoy life, with the result that people become addicted to things which are not necessities but the luxuries of life. We become attached to many things which we can very well do without and when we cannot get them, the mind becomes restless and unhappy. With the increase in scientific knowledge and inventions, our civilization is becoming more and more complex and although our standard of living is rising higher, it does not bring peace and happiness in our minds. The only way to escape from this state of continuous mental turmoil is to discard many superfluous things from our daily lives and maintain an attitude of non-attachment even while living on things which we can do very well without.

Let us learn a lesson from recent history. The acquisition of wealth in Western countries soon after the industrial age began, gave birth to a slogan for increasing and maintaining the enhanced standard of

living of the people. This standard was the economic standard of getting more money for enjoying the increasing comforts of life. That led to a competition among themselves for flooding the markets of the world with their goods. The more money they got, the competition became more and more keen. It is a fundamental law of human relations that you cannot increase your own standard of living excessively without lowering the standard of some others, because the system is based on exploitation and spoliation. The richer the industrial nations grew, the fiercer became the competition and the stronger became their armies till at last it erupted into two devastating world wars. What was the result? England and her allies won the wars but lost the peace. The world forces operated in a manner which reduced the conquerors nearly to bankruptcy and lowered the standard of living of the very people who fought the wars and even won them for the purpose of maintaining their high standard of living. The vanquished countries had to be helped by their own conquerors in recovering from their abject economic condition and in doing so the conquerors themselves became poorer. The English people had to cut down their wants to an ascetic level and work hard for producing and exporting goods to other people in order to get money for paying their debts to creditor countries. This is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the policy of raising the material standard of life of one country at the expense of others. It teaches a double lesson, firstly, that the whole humanity is one unit

and any attempt by a country to get rich at the expense of others recoils on itself, and secondly that raising the material standard of people to an excessive degree is a self-defeating goal of civilization. It creates an attachment to the material side of life to such a high degree that people are even prepared to adopt measures which would ultimately prove self-destructive. The standard of life must certainly be raised higher, but the standard is not to become over-rich at the expense of others but to lead a moderately enjoyable and nobler life as good citizens of the world. For that purpose, if one's own material standard of life is much higher than that of others, it becomes necessary to reduce it and also to raise the lower standard of others so as to reach the goal of having as far as possible, a common living standard for all civilised countries. After the experience of the last wars, there is now a growing realisation of this ideal for which international institutions have come into existence. But that is a distant goal which is even receding in the shadow of a third world war. In the meantime, the only true and effective way is to learn the lessons of the Gita to develop a sense of non-attachment towards the unessential things of life and keep the mind steady and firm. All other measures go only half way till the whole world is awakened to a sense of its duty towards humanity. A radical change in our sense of values for things of life can only come from within the minds of men and cannot be successfully imposed by force from without, and the entire teaching of the Gita is directed to such

a change from within. The Gita does not want people to give up the world and the joys of life. It impresses on them the necessity, for their own good, of curbing the acquisitive and adopting the renunciative spirit in all pursuits which destroy the peace and serenity of mind. This is the way of obtaining the best kind of joy which is more lasting than the temporary pleasures of life.

The fourth important lesson of the Gita for the present age is the integration of the individual with the social life in which he lives. We have now evolved Social Sciences on a scientific basis. We have raised the necessity of synthesising individual freedom with social obligations, but these remain only on the surface of the mind so long as there is no urge from within to sacrifice our personal benefits if they conflict with the social good. Totalitarianism and fascism arise out of external forces which are sought to be applied to compel men to conform to what the governing few regard as the good of their country. The natural result of the application of such external forces is to create a strong reaction and the resulting economic and political conflicts divide humanity into opposite camps. Just as religion has become a source of dividing instead of uniting the people on the earth, the social and economic ideologies based on class conflicts have been responsible for keeping up a nerve-racking tension between groups of opposing creeds. All this is the result of the forcible imposition of one's opinions on others. It is a biological law that there is no integration of life unless it is based on the

cohesion and adjustment of internal organs. The law applies with greater force to the social life of human beings. The inner urge can come only out of a conviction of the identity of interests. The Gita puts it even higher than that, identity of life. The Self-Realisation means the realisation of one's self in the wider life of our fellow-men. The Gita teaches us that there cannot be self-realisation without selflessness, i.e. the merging of the lower self with the higher self and the integration of the individual self with the larger social self. To achieve this kind of realisation we must begin from the bottom and integrate ourselves first with those who are nearest to us. That is our primary school of social education in which the lessons of the Gita can be among the first to be studied. Our social problems are increasing in numbers as well as in intensity. Distribution of wealth and the necessary articles of living have become a major problem. Many people some of whom pose to be religious-minded by making a show of the external practices of religion, are resorting to anti-social activities such as profiteering, black-marketing, adulteration and various other social crimes. To ease their guilty conscience, they make a show of charity by giving away some part of their ill-gotten money. Such charity really amounts to cheating the public and trying to bribe God in the deluded belief that their sins might be atoned by such display of selfish charity. They forget that social nemesis is a slow but sure method of the working of nature and sooner or later, it will overcome not only themselves but the

whole social life of the country. When the practice of religion becomes hypocritical, the whole institution of religion comes into ridicule and it is no wonder that it encourages an attitude of hostility against religion itself. It is a penalty that we are paying for neglecting the tenets of our religion. We call ourselves the most spiritual-minded people and we boast that the Hindu religion is the greatest of religions but the way in which we practise it and by which we tolerate anti-social activities on a vast scale among us goes to lower our reputation in the world. Any outsider coming to India feels that there is too much of religion in the land when he sees so many temples and all the pomp and paraphernalia for the worship of gods and goddesses. But behind all these external formalities, religion is losing its soul and is merely becoming a screen to cover a selfish and materialistic mentality. Never was the admonition of Krishna to Arjuna more significant and important than now when he asked Arjuna not to attach importance to formal creeds of religion but to come straight to him by becoming religious minded in thought and in actions. The following of a creed does not necessarily save a man from sin; it is the feeling of the heart with devotion to God, which is the same thing as devotion to duty, that can keep him on the straight path of true religion. Although our religion has become old, its lessons have not decayed by age. The religion as well as the culture of a country are to be judged not so much by their institutions as by the spirit which sustains them. The eternal truths of

the Gita are more important today than they were ever before. The priests and preachers of our religion will be doing an immense service to the people if they conduct themselves in the true spirit of Hinduism and lead their followers from outer to inner religion.

This leads us to the fifth and the last teaching of the Gita for the modern age, viz. the adoption of Humanism as a common religion. If religious creeds have a secondary value and the relation between man and God is to be realised through the relation between man and man, let men of different creeds meet on the common platform of Humanism. In the present age of rationalism, the best way to preserve religion as a guiding force in life is to practise it in a manner which is common to all persons of different denominations. There is no inconsistency or incompatibility in it. Whether you believe in idol worship and re-incarnation or not, service of Humanity is a form of worship of God which can be practised by persons of all religious faiths; and for rationalists such service is the sole religion. When men of different religious creeds are brought closer together in this common religion, they will come to appreciate that behind all the dogmas of creeds, there is one element which binds man and man together and if that element becomes a living force, only those doctrines will ultimately survive which do not conflict with humanitarian ideals.

The modern civilization which has been assiduously built up on the economic values of life is fast cracking up. After the overthrow of Fascism and Nazism, the

conflict has now assumed a more serious aspect as a clash between democracy and communism—both based on economic and political values of life. The ideological cold war of nerves may any day break into a war of atomic destruction which might affect the whole world. International organisations which have come into existence for bringing the nations of the world together on a humanitarian platform have turned into battlefields of strategic moves and wordy warfare. One is tempted to ask in what respect are we, the present generation of the world, better off than our forefathers from the standpoint of human relations? We boast of a superior civilization and describe the ancients as brutes and barbarians. But behind the thin veneer of our vaunted culture, we are ourselves hiding a racial complex and exploitation of weaker people for our own ends. Little regard is paid to the sanctity of human life. In our social and political relations, we have perfected the art of deceptive camouflage and polished hypocrisy. We are still a long way off from the ideal of Human Brotherhood to which we pay lip homage and with our present sense of values in life, it is impossible to make a nearer approach to that ideal, until world opinion is ripe to adopt internationalism not as a policy but as a religion.

How can the gospel of the Gita help us in this direction? True it is that according to the Gita it may even be necessary to destroy the evil forces retarding our progress by a righteous war of destruction against evil doers. It is, however, up to us to consider whether

we should follow that precept or the other and nobler precept which is also taught by the Gita, of waging the war against and conquering the evil forces in the battle-fields of our own minds. If we claim to be civilised and to have learnt the terrible lessons of devastating wars in the past, with the prospect of further mass destruction of men by atomic warfare, it is for us to decide whether we should adopt the latter alternative and start a campaign for the conquest of our own minds. The real test of our civilization would be to change the venue of battles from the outer regions of land, water and air to the inner regions of mind, heart and soul and vanquish the real enemy which lies within ourselves. That is the supreme lesson which the modern age has to learn from the Gita. If we do not, it would not be surprising that after the holocaust of atomic warfare, mankind once again returns to dwell in caves, leaving a wreck of its blasted culture and civilization.

We now come to the end of our task. If the Gita remains a valuable guide to our individual and collective life, as we have seen it does, even at the present day and probably more so, we have got to go to it and whatever may be our station or occupation in life, we have to ponder over its precepts till we bring our lives in tune with their teachings. Religion should not be treated merely as an appendage of life, but should be practised as a real art of life. That is why I have taken the Bhagavad-Gita which is really a treatise on the Art of Life as a model for integrating religion in our life. A student of this art requires

a systematic preparation of his mind to receive and appreciate the ideas which are to be used as materials for constructing an artistic edifice of life. Such preparation requires a background of knowledge which can be imparted by competent persons in our schools and colleges. Religious instruction in our educational institutions has become a controversial question in which both sides have taken extreme attitudes. In a country like India where there is not one but several religious faiths and dogmas and which has declared itself to be secular Republic, the State cannot rightly impart instruction in the dogmas of religion in its own institutions. Even in private institutions such instruction cannot be compulsory for all students. But religious instruction is not confined to the dogmatic teachings of different faiths. There is a better way of teaching religion by giving a student the knowledge of the general principles of natural and social sciences, and then leading him to discover for himself the existence of laws which govern not only the physical world but the world of human relations. When he ultimately sees that these laws proceed from the same source and there is one Power in the Universe which we have to obey by observing all its laws, he would begin to develop a religious mentality. The religious instruction in the educational institutions can stop there. Once the student's mind is filled with the integrated knowledge of the Absolute Power, it is for him to study the doctrines of religious creeds and adopt any particular faith he chooses according to his mental inclinations. He may

not even choose any particular creed and still he can be religious-minded. It is a mistake to suppose that a man must belong to some formal religious creed if he is to practise religion in life. All that is necessary is that all men of any creed or no particular creed should know as much as they can what their duties are as between man and man and between man and Supreme Cosmic Power in the Universe. In this way, the knowledge leading to religion can be and should be imparted in educational institutions, but the proper persons to impart knowledge of any particular creed are the religious preceptors who must themselves be not only learned but tolerant enough to lead the people from superstitious and mechanical practices of religion to the higher religion of rational faith and enlightened devotion.

If knowledge leading to religion can be and should be imparted in our educational institutions, the principles and precepts contained in the Bhagavad-Gita deserve to be inculcated in the minds of our students not from any sectarian but from a broad humanitarian standpoint. They should be taught to develop the art of life in themselves according to these principles and make their lives well-balanced, harmonious and beautiful specimens of that art. Thus may the lessons of the Bhagavad-Gita live in the modern age not merely in the words of its verses but in the lives of millions of men as an inspiration for creating the highest form of art—The Art of Human Life.

29.5.52.

ERRATA

<i>Page and Line</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Read</i>
45—21	untoward	outward
50—2	obstruse	abstruse
63—5	permanent	prominent
81—14	macrocosmic	microcosmic
83—20	God in (XI 13).	God in XI 33.
122—8	(XVIII 48).	(XVIII 47).
130—12	local	logical
134—9	(XVII 26, 27).	(XVII 27, 28).
172—12	raised	realised

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